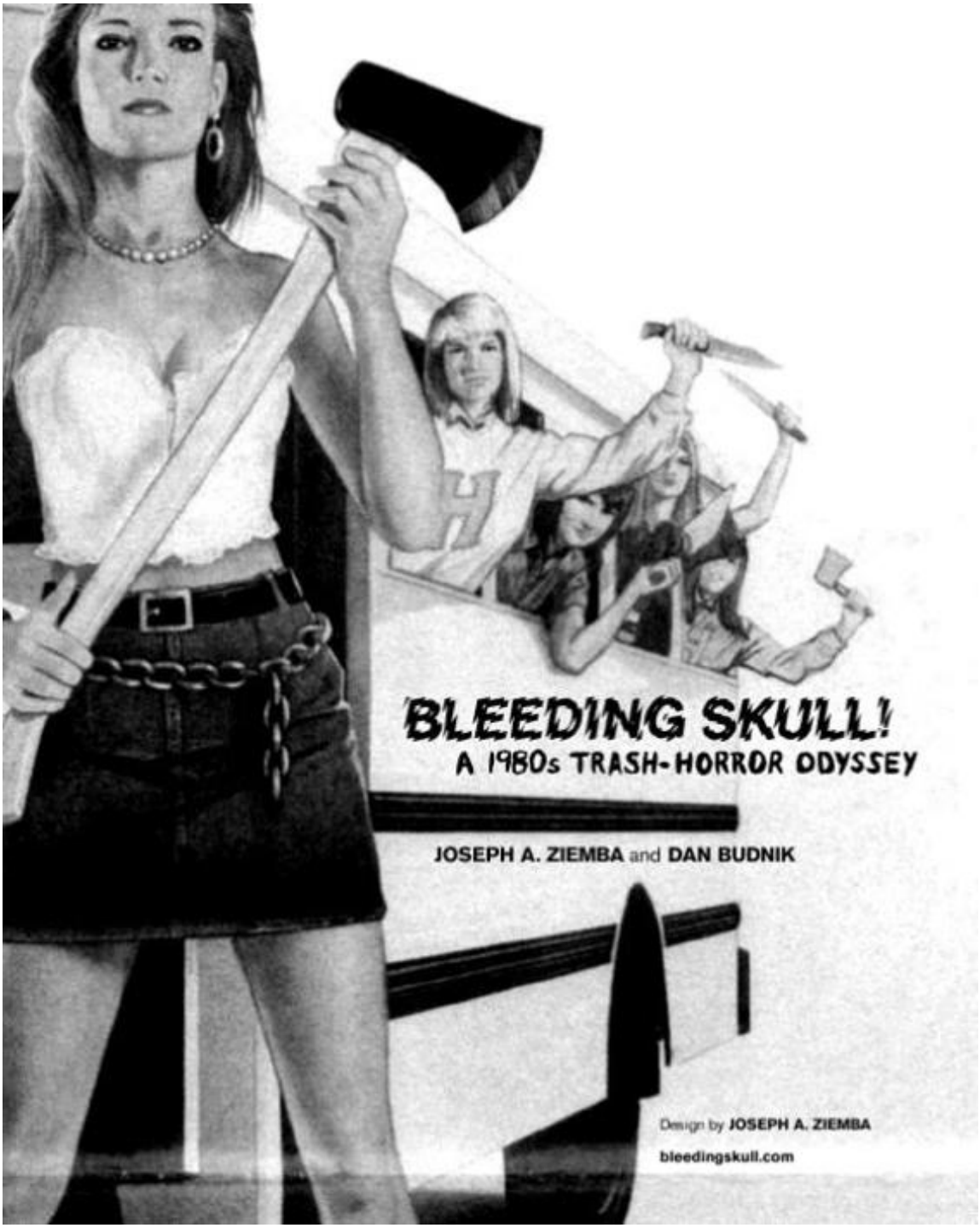
BLEEDING SKULL!
A 1980s TRASH-HORROR ODYSSEY
JOSEPH A. ZIEMBA and DAN BUDNIK
Design by JOSEPH A. ZIEMBA
bleedingskull.com

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*BLEEDING SKULL! A 1980s Trash-Horror Odyssey*
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SPECIAL
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**JOSEPH A. ZIEMBA**

First, Joseph E. and Carol Ziemba. They're my parents. If they didn't make me, this book wouldn't be happening. That's obvious. What's not so obvious is that without their friendship, support, and love, my life would be kind of lousy. They've stood by every creative endeavor I've ever been a part of, including this book. I want them to feel proud and warm inside because their son co-authored a book about movies with titles like *Death Nurse* and *Satanic Attraction.* Additionally, I hope that they can share this special feeling with their most cherished friends and neighbors.

Next, Zack Carlson. Zack is the co-author and editor of *Destroy All Movies!!! The Complete Guide To Punks On Film* (Fantagraphics), which is the new 21st century standard for books on cinema. Zack is the most genuine and kind person I've met through my work on Bleeding Skull. He donated his time to proofread this book. I'm grateful for his support and guidance throughout this process. He also sent me an original promotional poster from *The Hackers,* unannounced, and for no reason in particular. That's the kind of guy Zack is. I'm happy to call him a friend.

Then, there's Annie Choi. Annie is the author of the beautiful and hilarious *Happy Birthday or Whatever: Track Suits, Kim Chee, and Other Family Disasters* (Harper Collins) and the also beautiful and hilarious *Shut Up You're Welcome: Thoughts on Life, Death and Other Inconveniences* (Touchstone/Simon & Schuster). She's the most intelligent, funny, and inspiring person that I've met in many years. Annie donated her time to edit every word that I wrote for this book. She spent countless hours discussing all aspects of the book's process with me. She has also helped me to live better through strength, determination, and trust. Watching cannibals eating boobs with someone has never been so special.

Thanks to the following friends, filmmakers, and fellow film heroes for providing us with promotional materials, scans, photocopies, VHS tapes, and most of all, SUPPORT. We wish all of you happy lives

from here on out: Edward Ej Anttila, Tim Boggs, The Cinefamily of Los Angeles (Hadrian Belove, Bret Berg, Jordan Dobbs Rosa, Tom Fitzgerald), Gary Cohen, Johnny Cornett, Paige Davis, Mike Downey, Eddie Brandt's Saturday Matinee of Los Angeles (Claire Brandt, Donovan Brandt, Tony Nittoli, Alex Vandyne), Enzo Giobbe, Micki Grover, Evan Husney, Mikhail Ilyin, Josh Johnson, Doug Jones, Louis Justin, Adina Kwasigroch, Paul Malleck, the Margaret Herrick Library of Los Angeles and its staff, Jon McBride, Ryan McDonald, Carolee Mitchell, Christopher Palmer, Andre Perkowski, Lisa Petrucci, Wiley Pickett, Chris Poggiali, R.J. Porter, Micah Prude, Michael Raso, Tim Ritter, Eric Robitaille, Charles Pinion, Spencer Savage, Nathan Schiff, Richard Glenn Schmidt, Mark Shostrom, Paul Schwochow, Leland Thomas, Caelum Vatnsdal, Mark Veau, and David Zuzelo.

Thank you to David Kerekes, Thomas Campbell, and everyone at Headpress for helping us to make the dream of a Bleeding Skull book a reality.

Finally, a special thank you to Dan for being my confidant through it all.

**DAN BUDNIK**

To my mom, for letting me rent almost anything I wanted.

To my dad, for watching many of these films with me.

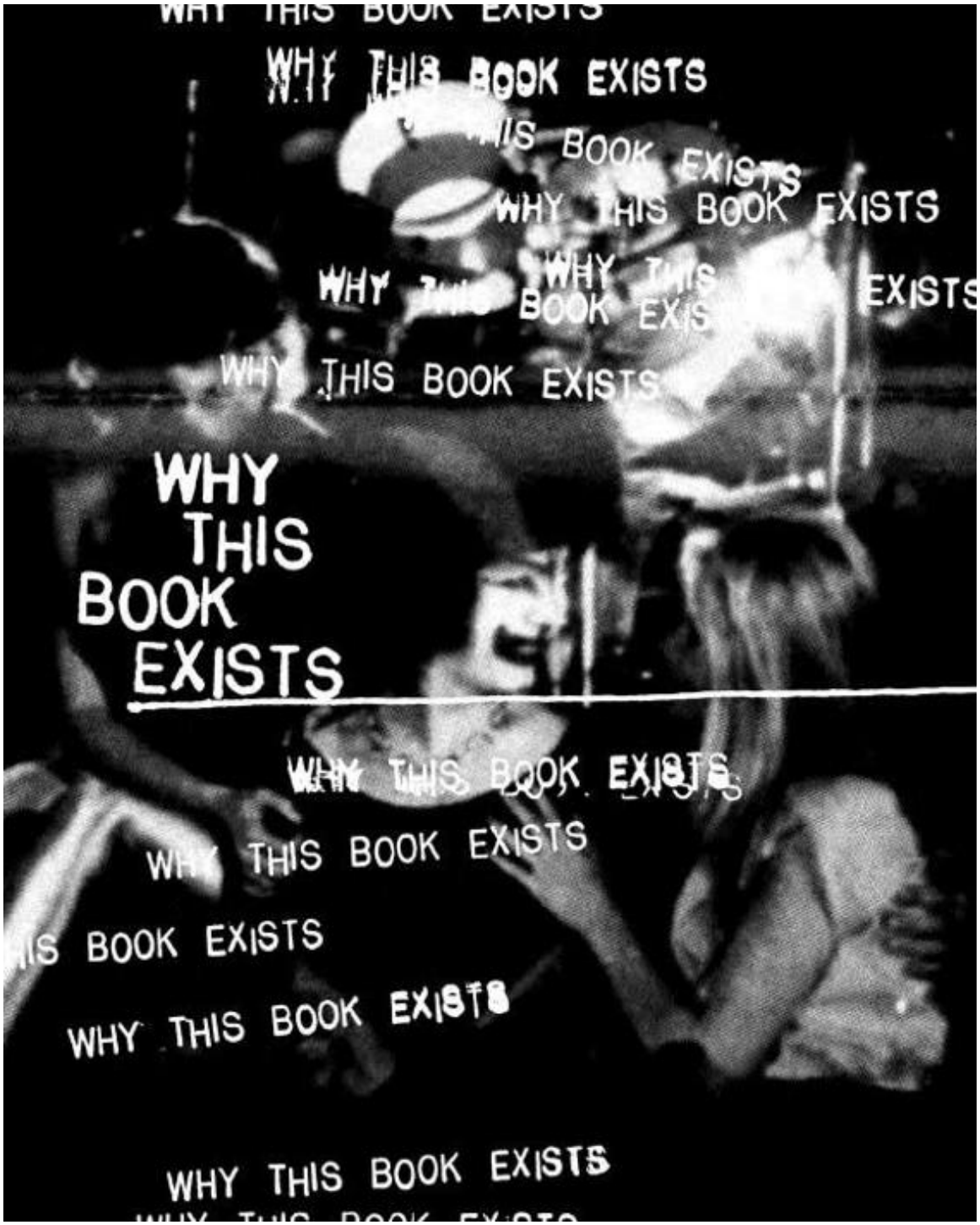
To Eric Zydel, for all the trips to video stores in the Rochester area.

To Uncle Mike and Pam Adamski, for describing the kill scenes in every early 1980s horror film to me when I was too scared to watch them.

To Joe, for inviting me along for the ride.

I want to dedicate this book to Madelynn Fattibene. My sweet wife and my best friend. Thank you for your constant support and your

never-ending love. This book is for you.



In *My Autobiography,* Charlie Chaplin stated that “One cannot wring one’s hands and express in words one’s appreciation of great art.”

Thankfully, we’re not dealing with great art.

**Bleedingskull.com** was launched on January 4, 2004. The intent was simple. I would write reviews of trash-horror films that were collected on VHS during my travels across the United States. I simply wanted to share my enthusiasm for these movies. The more obscure the film, the better. No ego. No over-analysis. Just me, the movies, and my enjoyment in collecting, exploring, and watching. Then, Dan and I met. It was clear that we might have been brothers who were separated at birth. We combined forces. And now, a decade after Bleeding Skull was conceived, we’ve built a massive archive totaling nearly one-thousand reviews and articles.

Bleeding Skull's initial focus was on the 1980s, especially films that were shot-on-video (SOV). This was virgin territory. No one acknowledged the importance of these movies in the history of exploitation filmmaking. What started as a creative outlet on the Internet transformed into a personal passion for giving these films the credit, respect, and understanding we felt they deserved. To the general public, Chester N. Turner is no Robert Altman. And Doris Wishman is certainly no John Cassavetes. Bleeding Skull sought to change this.

Why the 1980s? Our book celebrates a cinematic era that few people consider valid. In fact, if you flip through any number of film reference guides from the past thirty years, you'll find that 80s trash-horror is treated like a plague. One that will undoubtedly cause your dick or boobs to turn purple and fall off should you come into contact with it. Consider this book a changing of the guard. The gutter-underground of 80s horror was a final gasp in authentic exploitation filmmaking. It was a time when video stores were assaulted by unbelievable amounts of insanity, ineptitude, mystery, and earnestness. It was a time when D.I.Y. direct-to-video filmmaking led a home entertainment revolution. As the 1990s crept in, that time would end. Technological advances, trends of self-awareness, and the Internet eradicated the vitality of these big-boxed golden years. That's why we're here. That's why you're here. This era deserves to be acknowledged and preserved.

This book does not tell the stories behind the films. It was not written for people who agonize over trivia. It was written for people like us. People who want more than credit rolls and star-ratings. Bleeding

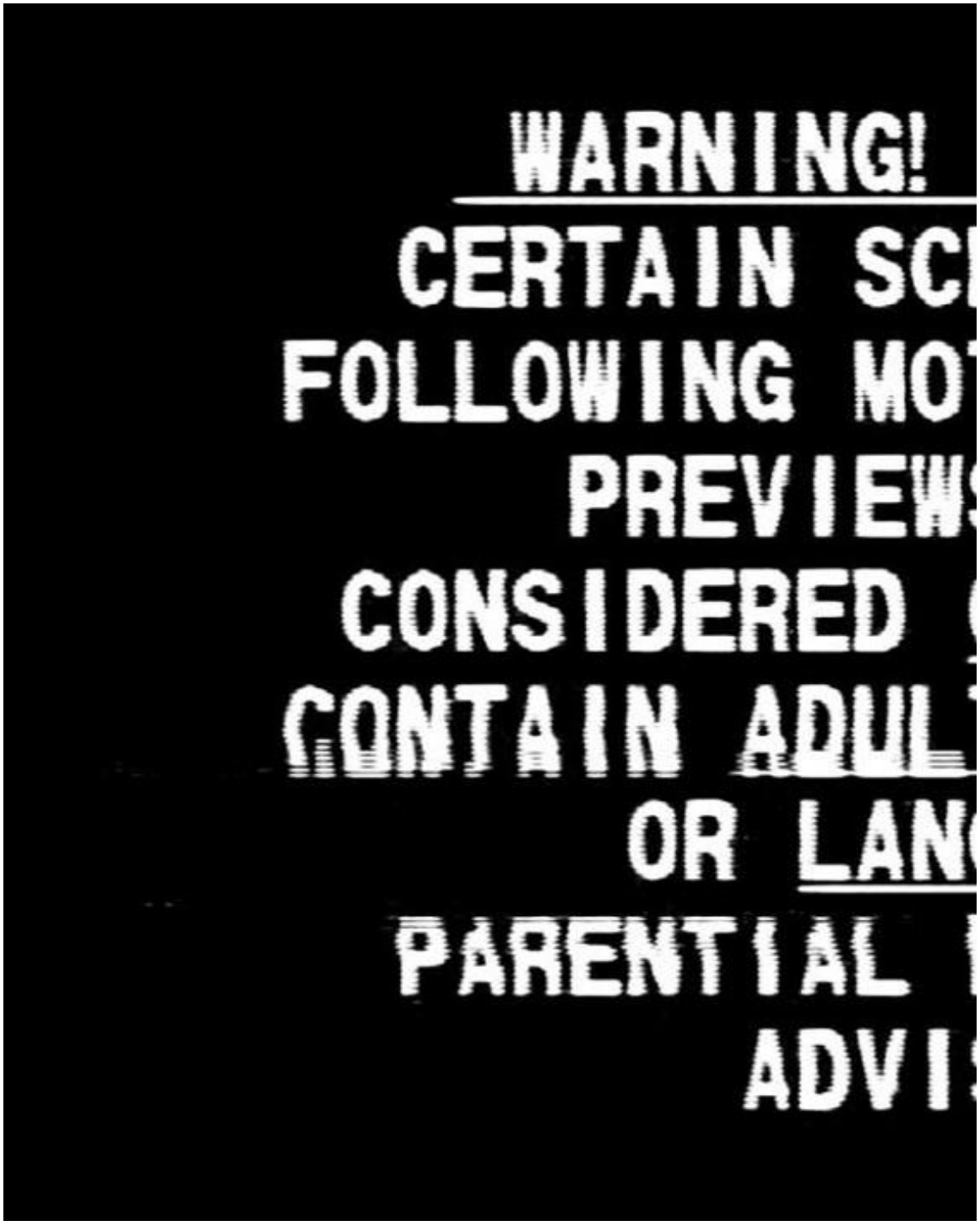
Skull is about how these films affect us. We don't care about what portion of *Al Filo Del Terror's* budget was devoted to purchasing clown wigs for midgets. We don't want to hear that *The Dark Side Of Midnight* was filmed in the DP's neighbor's house in exchange for some sweet stank weed. Who gives a shit? The idiosyncrasies of these movies conjure theories in our heads about why they exist. Those theories are often more stimulating than any behind-the-scenes tidbit we could ever uncover. That, as much as the content of the films themselves, is what defines our enthusiasm.

In the pages that follow, you'll find three hundred reviews of the most notable 80s trash-horror films. You won't find reviews of revered, genre-defining movies like *A Nightmare On Elm Street* or *My Bloody Valentine.* You'll find reviews of obscure, lo-fi "experiences" like *Long Island Cannibal Massacre* and *To All A Goodnight.* In order to make it in the book, each film had to be either produced or released during the 80s. There were no geographical restrictions. Movies were chosen because each one moved us to write. Whether they were agonizing *(Ghost Stories: Graveyard Thriller),* hilarious *(Mahakaal),* or groundbreaking in their strangeness *(Ogroff),* these films grabbed us. Obviously, this book is not comprehensive. One of the greatest joys of exploring these films is the comfort in knowing that there will always be another one out there. Always. That's why our hands will continue to wring. And that's why our words will continue to express.

As they say in *The Last Slumber Party:*

**LET'S MUNCH OUT!**

Joseph A. Ziemba
Los Angeles, CA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**TWO NOTES ABOUT THIS BOOK**

1. The name under the title of each film belongs to the director.

2. “SOV” refers to “shot-on-video.” That is, the movie you are reading about was photographed on video tape and not actual film.

# 555 (1988)

**Wally Koz**

“Caution: Viewing may cause severe damage to your brain cells.”

Shot on one-inch video tape in Chicago's Ukrainian Village, *555* hit the shelves courtesy of King Video Distributors. Director Wally Koz kick-started King Video to distribute this film and future releases. There weren't any. Nevertheless, Koz's ambitious *Dirty Harry* meets *New York Ripper* project was backed with a big advertising push towards video stores. There were full-sized posters and taglines such as: "Has a story line and a plot."

A hippie (fake beard, rayon Hawaiian shirt) spends his evenings brutally murdering couples, then having sex with the deceased females. Five couples, five nights, every five years. 555, get it? In case you're wondering, yes, we get to see the necro-humping. It's pretty great, and mostly takes place on filthy mattresses that a hobo wouldn't even piss on. Hot on the case are a couple of high-strung cops who yell a lot and say dumb things ("A real sicko, wanting to screw dead meat . . . different strokes for different folks!"). After gyros and bratwurst lunches at "Pepe's Hot Dogs," our vindictive officers argue with a female reporter and chase their only suspect. He's a 'Nam vet in a safari shirt.

The rest of *555* centers on false leads, gore-on-boobs, and a seriously negative slant towards women. The word "cunt" is used as a general reference point and every victim is hacked up while the camera stares at blood-drenched breasts. It's a bit much. But then a couple of fifty-somethings share a very invasive French kiss. Everything feels beautiful.

In 1988, most SOVs were concerned with "comedic" elements like Elvis impersonators *(Death Row Diner)* and Girl Scout zombies *(Phantom Brother).* Not 555. This is straight-up sleaze. That's why it's notable, hilarious, and worth your time. Like *Pieces* before it, this film is so over the top in terms of button-pushing stupidity that you can't help but hug it. There's also a sex scene so apathetic that it makes the encounter between Deputy Jack and Sheriff Lisa in *Nightbeast* feel like a two-hour blowjob from God. That's class.(JZ)

# THE ABOMINATION (1986)

**Bret McCormick**

A woman has puked. Her son has puked. His boss, his girlfriend, her kitchen cabinets, and a washing machine have puked. I think even Jesus has puked.

*Tabloid* was the first feature film from Texas-based filmmaker Bret McCormick and friends. It was a vignette-styled, John Waters-esque spoof that featured aliens invading an aerobics class, senior citizen zombies, and a computerized vacuum that killed people. While all of that sounds stunning when you say it out loud, the film never found a way to balance action, comedy, horror, and tedium. It also never found an audience. McCormick wasn't fazed.

Surfing the wave of homemade horror that saturated video stores in the mid 80s, McCormick and partner Matt Devlen grabbed a Super 8 camera, hit the backyard, and created *Ozone! Attack Of The Redneck Mutants* and *The Abomination.* They're two trash-gore films that were shot back-to-back, edited on video, and crammed full of neon barf, disembowelments, and ambitious latex monsters. While the more lucid *Ozone!* faded into obscurity, *The Abomination* fared better. Donna Michelle Productions, the Hollywood-based company responsible for unleashing Jon McBride's *Cannibal Campout* and Michael Savino and Mark Veau's *Attack Of The Killer Refrigerator,* picked up the movie for distribution. The success or failure of this movie is a moot point. It found limited distribution. It was placed on video store shelves. And it entices to this day.

Cody lives with his mom in a wood-paneled shack. Mom devotes her life to shady evangelist Brother Fogg. She also has a tumor. Cody fills his days by working as a mechanic, driving around in a truck with his girlfriend, and suffering from nightmares. Mom hacks up the tumor, but it's never explained exactly how or why this happens. The tumor infects Cody. He coughs one up, too. Soon, the tumors multiply, infect the entire house, and take form as The Abomination. The Abomination – a beet-red mass of teeth and curious openings and tentacles! The Abomination – a force that originates from the

Bible's prophecy of Daniel and eats everyone! There's also a scene of Brother Fogg taking a shit.

The infamy of *The Abomination* is built on a gritty onslaught of barfing, Biblical riffing, and extreme gore. That's why you're inspired to seek it out and watch. You want to see a bloody vagina monster that hides in cupboards (and a washing machine) bite a person in half. But *The Abomination* isn't significant because it's disgusting. *Street Trash* is also disgusting. But *Street Trash* is slick and professional. It feels like the filmmakers were intentionally trying to make a gross-out "hit." By the nature of its no-budget origins, *The Abomination* is something more distinct and special.

Douglas McKeown's *The Deadly Spawn.* Nathan Schiff's *They Don't Cut The Grass Anymore.* George Barry's *Death Bed: The Bed That Eats.* Each of these films builds its own set of rules within the confines of trash-gore cinema. They hold no ties to rational thought. They push the boundaries of exploitive D.I.Y filmmaking that were set by *The Wizard Of Gore* and *Blood Freak* in the decades before. *The Abomination,* with its mismatched post-dubbing, constant jump cuts, and stray insertions of tape-manipulated voices, synthesizers, and library music, is included in this group. Ideas are reiterated obsessively, beginning with a five minute gore reel that kicks off the film. Events are thrown together as if by chance. After the initial set-up, the film devolves into plotless chaos. The final twenty minutes explode with the stench of wet cow intestines and pissed jeans. There's no escape. It's psychedelic anxiety, 1980s style.

For all of its inventiveness, *The Abomination* isn't perfect. There are many scenes of people driving in trucks. Repetition slows things down. A slight dip into intentional comedy fails. Unlike *The Deadly Spawn,* which shares a similarity in general design and theme, there's no real focal point to the film as a whole. It's a problem that's very much in keeping with *They Don't Cut The Grass Anymore:* Gore overload without thematic clarity. *The Abomination* may not be a complete success, but it's far from forgettable. (JZ)

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# AL FILO DEL TERROR (1990)

**Alfredo B. Crevenna**

Suffer, little children. The El Griego Show is on the air.

There are two sides to every man. Sometimes there are two sides to every movie. But what if those two entities coalesced? The philosophic possibilities would be daunting; infinite, even. Generously, one film heard the call and answered with alarming clarity. Two divergent entities became one, and still didn't get along. I won't go into the details of how I chanced upon this tape in a questionable Chicago neighborhood, how my VCR ferociously ate it at the 40 minute mark, or how it took me an entire evening to survey and repair the damages. Salvation is all that matters. *Al Filo Del Terror* has been unearthed. Clown-midgets see red. Ventriloquists sue. I rejoice.

Meet El Griego. He's a kids' TV show ventriloquist with several hang-ups. His jokes stink. His living room looks like someone vomited on every piece of furniture, then covered that furniture with plastic. El Griego beats his six-year-old daughter Carlita, kills his father, and slits the throat of his girlfriend, all while pursuing the fame that comes with ventriloquism. Too bad there aren't any fire-breathing, goop-vomiting, sword-wielding clown-midgets locked in the basement to even the score. Oh. Pardon me. There are.

*Al Filo Del Terror* is a constant battle between opposites that never mesh. I couldn't care less. A Mexican film (with no subtitles) from prolific exploitation director Alfredo Crevenna *(Aventura Al Centro De La Terra), Al Filo* is no dream. Indeed, this film is alive, a hybrid of *The Garbage Pail Kids Movie,* somebody's whipping fetish, and excerpts from the life of The World's Worst Father.

Two types of scenes hang around. One features people staring at each other. The other focuses on four clown-midgets and the world that surrounds them. This arena includes – but is not limited to – the following: Carlita picking up a severed head. El Griego whipping,

slapping, and chopping the clown-midgets with an axe. Clown-midget hallucinations. An aerobics workout scene. Carlita helping the clown-midgets with a communal bath. Finally, El Griego dressing Carlita as a clown-midget, then using her in his act. There's no style, sense of pace, or explicitness to any of this. As expected, there is a lot of screaming and crying. (JZ)

# AMERICAN NIGHTMARE (1983)

**Don McBrearty**

Did you know that they have funerals for hookers?

I've always considered *Night Warning* to be the feel-bad slasher of 1983. Homophobic cops, an incestuous aunt, guilt-ridden sex – it's a tough slump to beat. Then, along comes *American Nightmare.* When a son accosts his father with "That's you – FUCKING YOUR OWN DAUGHTER!," it's blatantly clear that the depression ante has been upped. Thank goodness for strippers with sweat-stained crotches, and the things they do on filthy plywood floors. That makes me feel much better.

It's an American Nightmare! Filmed in Toronto! A hooker named Tanya is murdered by someone who wears rubber gloves and a towel. Eric, Tanya's brother, immediately seeks revenge. Eric is a famous pop-pianist, but he also enjoys ripping off muggers' ears and falling in love with strippers. Soon, Eric dives into the exciting world of porn shops, strip clubs, fraudulent businessmen, underground sex tapes, incest, drug addiction, a guy named "Mr. Fixer," and of course, transvestites. The killer adds a bowler hat to his repertoire. Another stripper has a disapproving boyfriend. They fight a lot.

Produced by Ray Sager, *The Wizard Of Gore* himself, *American Nightmare* hits the ground running. It's drab, abrasive, and heaving with unsanitary visuals. The murder scenes unsettle. The hazy photography consents. And solemn pianos unify it all in total bleakness. Clearly, there's a time and a place for this type of hate-the-world dejection. And clearly, this film is it. However, unlike the

instantly immersive *The Driller Killer, American* cancels out the grit with waves of lazy disinterest. Actors give it their all, but can't deliver the required intensity. Strippers strip for minutes on end. And, most tellingly, the killer inexplicably DISAPPEARS during the last half of the film.

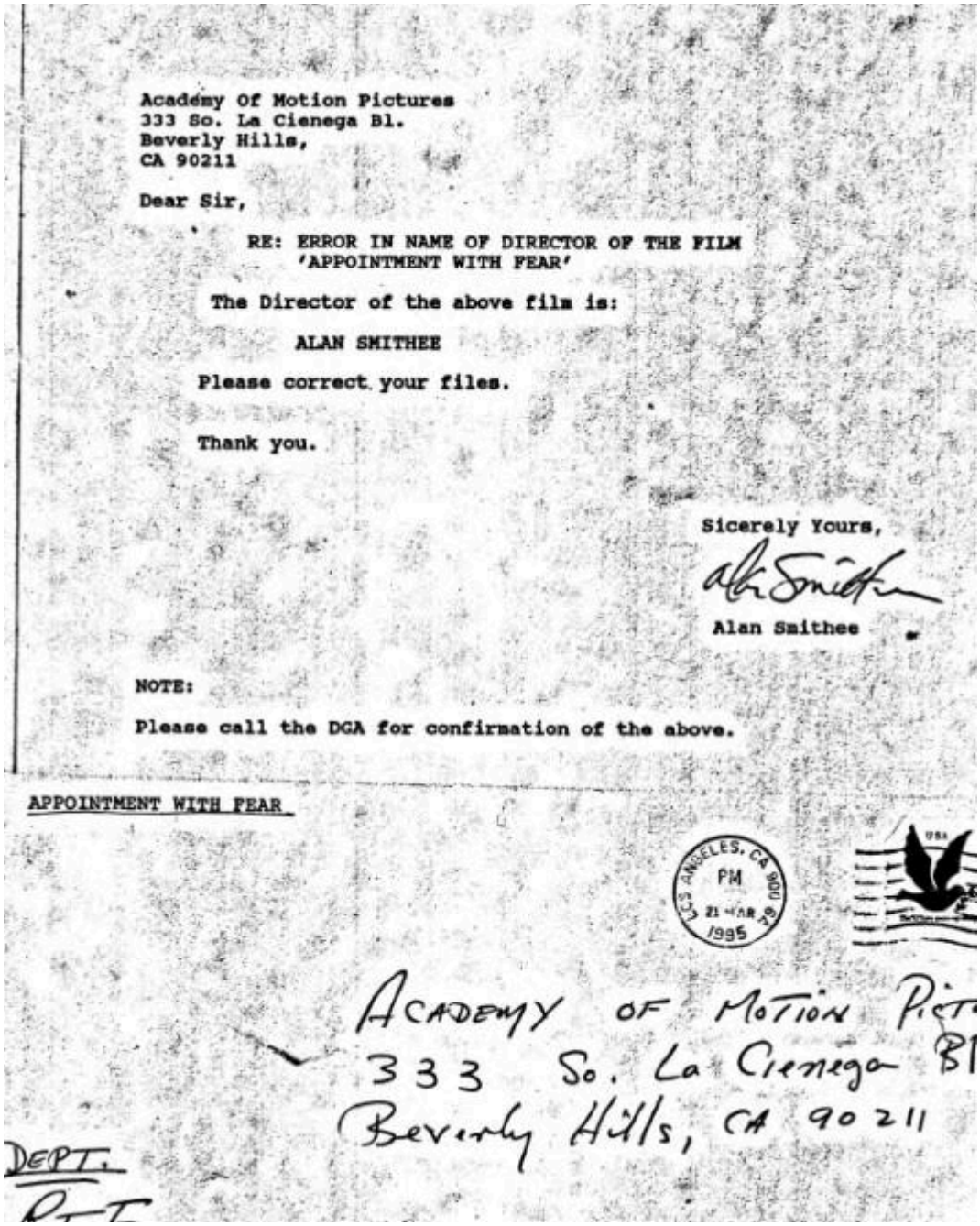
*American Nightmare.* Not as fun as a hooker's funeral, but pretty damn close. (JZ)

# APPOINTMENT WITH FEAR (1985)

**Alan Smithee aka Ramzi Thomas**

The movie starts off with four different dramatic threads:

1. There's a woman eavesdropping on neighbors with sophisticated listening equipment.



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Dear Sir,

RE: ERROR IN NAME OF DIRECTOR OF THE FILM
'APPOINTMENT WITH FEAR'

The Director of the above film is:

ALAN SMITHEE

Please correct your files.

Thank you.

Sincerely Yours,

Alan Smithee

NOTE:

Please call the DGA for confirmation of the above.

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2. There's something going on with a baby.

3. There's a grizzled detective named Kowalski, who is tracking down a perp.

4. There's a strange supernatural thing going on with a comatose asylum inmate.

In theory, that should keep me interested as I try to figure out what's going on and watch the plotlines and characters combine. Instead, I sighed a lot. The basic idea behind *Appointment with Fear* has potential. There is a killing in the beginning of the film. After that, I thought that something like this was going to happen: The lead woman, Carol, hears the killing while it is happening but she can't see it. Another gal sees it happening but can't hear it. Kowalski pulls up too late to see or hear anything but he knows what's going on.

Nothing like that happens. We spend ages following the eavesdropping Carol. We spend a lot of time with her boyfriend who has long hair and drives a motorcycle with a mannequin in the sidecar. There is a large house in the hills where everyone ends up. There's a homeless man who spends the movie standing around a pickup truck and mumbling. A bunch of Carol's friends break into a modern dance routine in front of the house for no discernible reason. Today, it would be a flash mob. In 1985, they called it trespassing. There is also an Egyptian god of nature in a coma trying to sacrifice his infant son.

*Appointment With Fear* is professionally made, well-acted and looks good. But, there's absolutely no reason to keep watching from moment to moment. I found some things that I like but not a lot. There is a scene with Kowalski and an asylum inmate named Joe that has some good acting in it, mainly from Joe. The leading actors are all attractive. There is a fire gag by the pool that is impressive. Someone explodes into a thousand leaves at the end. That's all I have.

In the production notes, director Ramzi Thomas describes the film as "a surrealistic blend of mythology and contemporary society." The notes mention the Phrygian myth of Attis and Cy-bele. Cybele was an earth goddess who loved Attis, a handsome youth. He didn't love her. She drove him mad. He castrated himself and died. Cybele, with Zeus' assistance, insured that Attis' body never decayed. Attis is a resurrection god, similar to the nutjob in this movie. The homeless man may be crazy but crazy people were revered back in the day.

The modern dance scene is a contemporary version of a ritualistic dance. Thomas loaded this film with metaphor and symbolism. He knew what he was doing.

What happened? The movie was prepared with great forethought. It was shot. Then, upon reaching the editing bays, the filmmakers must have discovered that some important, nebulous element was missing. It must have weighed on the director because he decided to use the pseudonym “Alan Smithee.” When I discovered the great ambition behind the film, I watched it again. I can see what Thomas is talking about. I can see the Attis myth. I can see that the modern dance is meant to be an updating of the frenzy of devotion that Cybele’s followers would get into. All that is great. But it’s not very interesting. It feels like I’m reading a dry academic paper on “Modern Day Myths.” (DB)

# ATTACK OF THE BEAST CREATURES (1985) aka HELL ISLAND

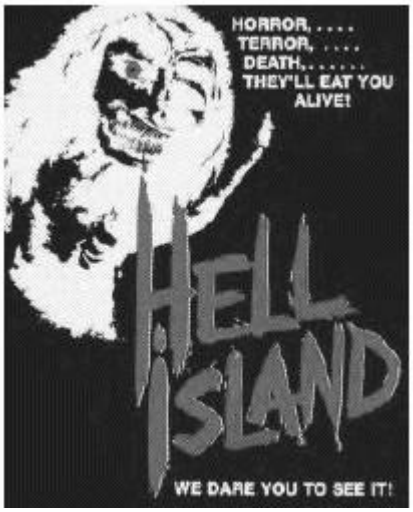
**Michael Stanley**

I am a fan of “Monster Kid” Super 8 movies. Enthusiastic kids with giant ideas bursting through their heads, matched up with the shakiest of equipment, trying so hard to emulate the movies they love. Hell, I was a video Monster Kid, although I made mainly comedy sketches and little action pieces. When I was eight years old, my magnum opus *Attack Of The Killer Bagels* won a Gramma Oscar at the Budnik Family Awards that year. Doing this sort of thing is a natural outlet for the creative kid. You copy what you love and eventually you do your own thing. The same happens with writing and I’m pretty sure it happens with music.

But, the Monster Kid is still technically a kid. The charming but flat-footed bumbling of my childhood is one thing. Could you harness that childhood verve, that bubbling and bursting zeal and make something bigger? Something full-length and “epic?” Although I had

seen flashes here and there, I wasn't completely sure until I saw *Attack Of The Beast Creatures.*

In 1920, a ship goes down in the middle of the ocean. The survivors are crowded onto a big lifeboat where personalities are beginning to clash. They end up on a lovely island. But the island has acid lakes and something tiny and vicious lurking in the darkness. When our weary bunch least expects it, the Beast Creatures attack. They are tiny little monsters with waves of teeth and little spears. Will the cast survive? Or will they be food for the monsters?




*Attack Of The Beast Creatures.* The title should tip you off. We're definitely in the center of grown-up Monster Kid territory here. Amateur actors giving it their all. Waves of synthesizers washing across the soundtrack. A lot of wandering through woods. Frequent attacks by tiny monsters that alternate between rather silly and really quite good. And an ending that isn't an ending but the point where the required running time is reached. It's all here.

I wish it was all fun. But, the elements that define this film as a grown-up goof-around also drag it down a bit. When I was a kid, editing and compressing screen time was always a problem. You've got six people and you need to convey the fact that they're walking a long way. You can show this through editing. A montage covering how much ground they've passed and possibly the sun moving

across the sky. Or you can show people walking and walking and walking. To me, the latter route was the one to take. If they need to go from here to there, the way you convey that is by having them go from here to there. If a point has to be made in dialogue, it must be very clearly made. No subtlety allowed.

All of these things are fine for kids movies because, really, who is going to watch them? Some friends? Your parents? Gramma? They'll humor you and never watch it again. The films are more for you than anyone else. Each film is another rough draft where you refine everything and make it better. *Attack Of The Beast Creatures* was available for purchase on VHS. Regardless of the filmmakers' intentions, cash exchanged hands. And that makes all the difference.

This movie retains an amateur enthusiasm that makes for very fun viewing, but holds in the amateur's faults as well. People talk and talk and talk when a line or two would suffice. People walk and walk and walk when a few steps would work wonders. For every great moment, there is another that can make a viewer very impatient. But, somewhere along the line, the defects become pluses. The walking becomes hypnotic. And, I really start to enjoy the overwrought dialogue as I wait for something to happen. Maybe the film just needs a trim? One of my all-time favorites, *The Last Slumber Party,* is 72 minutes long. Maybe a 72-minute cut of *Attack Of The Beast Creatures* would be just right.

This is a decent monster attack film that shows the Monster Kids all grown up and not having learned a thing. To some, a warning. To me, cause for praise and running and yelling "Huzzah!" and buying ice cream cones for people I don't know and smiling. (DB)

# ATTACK OF THE KILLER REFRIGERATOR (1984)

**Michael Savino & Mark Veau**

In the early 1980s, my parents installed a beer tap in our wood-paneled basement. The reason? My dad wanted to liven up the

parties that were thrown for Tony's TV, his "after hours" basketball team. From what I can remember, the Tony's TV all-nighters featured Doritos and lots of farts and grown men with colorful nicknames (Dr. I — the I stands for insanity!) mooning each other and their significant others. That being said, I have two questions:

1. Where was the camcorder hidden?

2. How did Michael Savino and Mark Veau sneak it in?

*Attack Of The Killer Refrigerator* is what happens when someone throws a party, then decides to video-cam that party and call it a movie. Shot with pocket change on ½-inch tape somewhere in Massachusetts by co-directors/writers Savino and Veau, *Killer* vies with *Boardinghouse, Sledgehammer,* and *Black Devil Doll From Hell* as one of the first publicly released SOV horror productions in the history of the United States. Unfortunately, the film wasn't distributed on video until the end of the decade, so the big guns win by default. But *Killer* is only 15 minutes long. Everyone can benefit from that.

Handwritten titles invite us to a brownstone built on moaning synths, Mr. Bill impressions, and The Cars' "Heartbeat City." Last week, a party was thrown with the sole purpose of knocking the shit out of an old freezer with a hammer (they needed the ice). This week, the pissed fridge takes revenge by eating whichever wandering, post-coital cast member chances by. There's a lot of VFW haunted house gore. The Refrigerator breathes fire while the soundtrack breathes tape-manipulated madness. More often than not, I couldn't understand what people were saying, and sound emitted from the left speaker only. Beautiful.

You know what's great about this film? It's never played for laughs – the content is completely earnest. When you're dealing with a concept as patently ridiculous as a possessed refrigerator, that's no minor feat. Everyone appears to be having a great time, and Savino and Veau are clearly functioning by the seat of their Jordaches. *Attack* is a pleasant experiment that anticipates ideas and techniques set forth in *The Abomination* (monster-in-the-kitchen carnage) and *Blood Lake* (righteous-party-as-movie), but does them one better by cutting out WAY before we realize what's going on. So, there's nothing to dislike.

By the way, I just figured this out:

1. It was hidden in Disco Bob's afro. Disco Bob is white.

2. Savino and Veau told Dr. I that they were filming a documentary on his life. That may have been true. I'll ask my dad. (JZ)

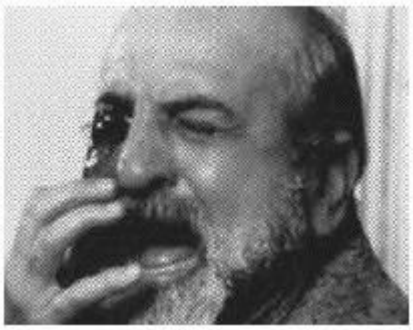
# BEAKS THE MOVIE (1987)
# aka BIRDS OF PREY aka EVIL BIRDS

**Rene Cardona, Jr.**

In *Beaks The Movie,* birds all over the world go mad and begin killing people. A roving reporter and her roving cameraman friend follow the trail. They work for some sort of local Spanish TV station and end up flying all over the place on a series of vague leads. Assorted groups of characters appear, get chased around by birds and then vanish for long periods of time. There is a show-stopping attack at a children's party. There is an attack on a train full of evacuees. I stepped towards the kitchen, real quick, to get some Cool Ranch Doritos. When I'd returned, the movie was over. I thought I had missed the big ending. No. It just ended.

*Beaks* is a low-budget, suspense-free rip-off/homage of *The Birds.* The reason behind such a film? Sheer entertainment. Does it succeed? Hell yes. It's pure unadulterated goofball filmmaking, shifting randomly from scene to scene and event to event. Any glue

that might hold characters or stories together is nonexistent. It's a conglomeration of bird attacks with some other crowd-pleasing bits thrown in. And, it's all the better for it.



I enjoyed *Beaks The Movie* for the same reasons I really enjoy *Cracked Magazine* circa 1975-1985. *Cracked* would blatantly pander to their pre-teen and teen boy audience. They didn't do a lot of political stuff. They didn't do a lot of movie parodies, unless the film was *Jaws* or *Star Wars. Mad* would cover all that. *Cracked* stuck with pop culture's brightest stars at that moment.

Case in point: The Fonz appears on the cover of one issue of *Mad.* And they've drawn Groucho Marx glasses, nose and mustache on him. Behind him, we see "Ayyyy!" and "Sit On It!", written over and over. The cover caption says that they refuse to capitalize on big stars the way other magazines do. They were referring to the fact that from 1976-1978 The Fonz appears on around six covers of *Cracked.* Why? To sell the magazine. They team him up with Laverne & Shirley, *Close Encounters,* Rocky and he is seen at the beach with Darth Vader. Anything to sell the magazine. There was even a "Fonz for President! Collector's Edition." For that brief period of time, if you loved The Fonz, there was a place to go during all those hours when he wasn't on TV.

What I'm saying is that director Rene Cardona, Jr. worked audiences the way *Cracked* did. You want a movie about killer birds? You want 80s gore? You want some skin? Mr. C knows you do and he knows that you don't want to sit around and wait for any of it. *Beaks* demands nothing. It just is. (DB)

# BEAUTY QUEEN BUTCHER (1991)

**Jill Zurborg**

A scene featuring two jumpsuit-clad grandmas spoke to me. It said, “Run, Joe. Run for your life.”

Twenty minutes later, a scene of two kids in oversized sweatshirts delivering Arsenio Hall “whoops” spoke to me. It said, “No fucking around this time, Joe. Get out.”

Sixty minutes later, a private investigator’s wall plaque read: “Another Day Shot To Hell.” It also spoke to me. It said: “This movie hates you, Joe.”

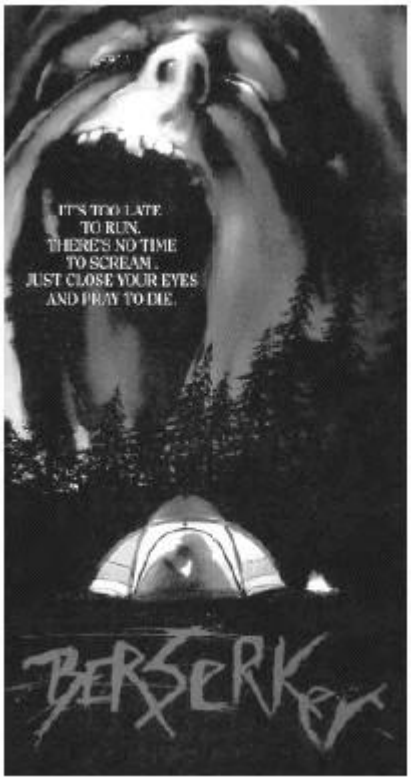
One of the finest pleasures in exploring SOV is the simple fact that there’s always another film to find. You finish watching *Death Nurse.* Then, *Streets Of Death* shows up. Life is good. And challenging. For every *Heavy Metal Massacre* (two steps shy of heaven) you inevitably run into a *Survival 1990* (total pain forever). Or, a *Beauty Queen Butcher.* No amount of Arsenio whoops can save us now.

Shot in the Quad Cities of Illinois sometime in the late 80s and never released on legit VHS, *Beauty Queen Butcher* is a benchmark in slow burn agony. It follows the plight of “lard ass” teenager Phyllis as she gets humiliated during beauty pageants, at school, and in life in general. There are many fat jokes, a fair amount of drag queen bitching, and several montages involving a mall, dancing, and eating. It’s like a combination of *Heathers* (Cliques!), *Carrie* (Vengeance!), *Criminally Insane* (A fat woman eating!), and *Polyester* (Lots of Aqua Net!). By that logic, this film should cause a riot of pure joy in my living room. But it doesn’t.

The first bloodless kill scene chimes in at 70 minutes. SEVENTY MINUTES! For perspective, *The Last Slumber Party* is just about over by that point. If *Beauty Queen* wrapped things up at approximately 72 minutes, the mulleted pageant host and awful/awesome Jason Voorhees knock-off mask might have outweighed

the numbness of people opening envelopes and eating Twinkies. But this thing schleps along for 120 minutes. ONE HUNDRED

AND TWENTY MINUTES! That's two full hours of Phyllis bending over to reveal her flower-patterned underpants and you not laughing when she does that. (JZ)




# BERSERKER (1987)

**Jefferson Richard**

Check out this tagline:

"A group of college students stumble across the chilling legend of a bloodthirsty Viking warrior!"

A slasher with a Viking warrior killer? Genius. Count me in. Because really, there's no reason to watch *Berserker,* aside from the possibility that we'll get to see a Viking warrior chop someone in half.

Opening scene: Senior citizens walk through the woods. There is also a bear. He has some claws and knows how to use them. I'm semi-worried.

Next 15 minutes: Josh and his friends wear elastic-waist jeans and score a perfect 10 in the feather-mullet championships. After gassing up a high-octane truck, they drive to Rainbow Valley campgrounds, toke some doobs, and drink lite beer. Afternoon arrives. Everyone sweats a lot. Soon, Josh and pals pull off tons of sweet tricks on three wheelers, pour beer on each others' heads, and explain the legend of the Berserker. The Berserker is a convoluted Nordic myth that's rumored to turn bears into possessed killers. Uh-oh.

Meet the killer: After talking with "Pappy," a drunken caretaker and/or hobo, one of the girls walks into the woods to take a leak. A bear stalks her. Blood flows. I'm pissed.

Yep. The killer in *Berserker* is actually a bear. Granted, the promised Viking warrior appears unceremoniously during the climax. But he does not look like a Viking warrior. He looks like the singer of a local Iron Maiden cover band with a dog mask. Since the bear ends up mauling the Viking warrior in a not-so-exciting wrestling match, it's never explained just who did the slayings in the first place. Remaining minutes are populated with people talking in the woods, an amusing kill-sex montage, male bonding over beer and chess, and the bear looking around. Slowly. Also, an atrocious synth-metal song repeats the phrase "You're a cool dude!" over and over.

Awkward edits. Hysterical dialogue. Surprisingly gruesome kill scenes. This is all great stuff. But again, the killer was a grizzly bear. Not a Viking warrior. *Berserker,* you're not a cool dude. (JZ)

# THE BEST OF SEX AND VIOLENCE (1981)

**Ken Dixon**

Every family has a member who loves dirty jokes. He's usually an uncle, or someone who married into the family. Sometimes, he walks

down the basement staircase, farting with each successive step, and says, “Hey, who stepped on a goose?” Sometimes, he brings a copy of *More Of The World’s Best Dirty Jokes* to family functions and chooses to recite his favorites after the kids have “gone to bed.” Today, he brought a videotape. It’s called *The Best Of Sex And Violence.* The back cover says it all:

“Coming attractions that never cum!”

*The Best Of Sex And Violence* is the first of a trio of VHS trailer compilations from Wizard Video and director Ken Dixon. Elvira’s *Filmgore* followed in 1983, then *Zombiethon* in 1986. This one is all about fun and money. You can throw boobs in there, too. Wizard wanted to make money. They knew that people wanted to have fun. Plan in hand, Wizard hired John Carradine, armed him with some burlesque one-liners ( “*Truck Stop Women* – They douche every 50 miles!”), and let twenty-eight rare exploitation film trailers fly at our faces. Seventy-seven minutes of boobies, tittay-tots-tots, butts, a little bloodshed, and Rudy Ray Moore.

A woman's clothes are torn off. She runs. Her bra disappears! There's a knife! There's a Barnes & Barnes-esque theme song performed by "ROME"! Then, John Carradine bids us welcome. The trailers are loosely categorized around Carradine's "dirty old man" shtick and they unfold thusly: *Bury Me An Angel; The Doberman Gang; Tunnelvision; The Sin Of Adam & Eve; Bill Osco's Alice In Wonderland; Cinderella; Fairy Tales; Emanuelle Around The World;*

*Tanya's Island; I Spit On Your Grave; Tourist Trap; The Boogey-man; Zombie; The Single Girls* ("There's a tit maniac on the loose!"); *The Working Girls; The Manhandlers; Dr. Minx; Truck Stop Women; The Twilight People; Beyond Atlantis; The Devil's Wedding Night; Sweet Sugar; Terminal Island; Ebony, Ivory & Jade; Dr. Black & Mr. Hyde; Dolemite; The Human Tornado;* and *The Disco Godfather.* David and Keith Carradine show up for 20 seconds, stare at their feet, and laugh. Finally, the Earth blows up. Wizard tells us to "Watch For The Best Of Sex And Violence II!" I'm still waiting.

Though light on the savagery, *The Best Of Sex And Violence* rebuffs criticism. Like Continental's *Terror On Tape,* it's a leader in the compilation tape clique. Mindless, squirm-inducing, and undeniably fun 'n' stoopid, this type of nostalgic home entertainment is long gone. Today, every trailer here can be watched on YouTube. The films themselves can be accessed through any number of methods without leaving the comfort of your underwear. But it's not the same. VHS still holds the advantage. Because this entire tape, including the opening credits, is hilariously cropped. I'm still looking for a copy of *THE OOGEYMA,* but no one has heard of it. (JZ)

# BITS AND PIECES (1985)

**Leland Thomas**

Calling all ladies!

*Bits And Pieces* features the first (and only) use of male-strippers-as-padding in an early 80s trash film. But, the film also provides a "Guide to Scoring with Your Star Witness" for balding, middle-aged police lieutenants who say things like, "SHEEEIIIT! We gotta stop this fuckin' psycho!" Clearly, all types of people can benefit from *Bits And Pieces.* Given the chance, they will.

Club 2001 is open. The synth-pop is mentally challenged. The women are loose, yet picky. And the strippers? They're dudes. It is here that a man named Arthur channels George McFly while stalking his female prey – prey that ends up trussed, stabbed, and dismembered in his shack. Why, Arthur, why! Did Mommy catch you peeking in on her sexcapades? And then dress you up as a girl at her boyfriend's insistence? And now you're an adult who kills women because they're all whores – just like Mommy? I think I'm onto something. Luckily, the cop, a college student named Rosie, and an air-conducting father (like air-guitar, but strictly classical) are onto the same thing.

Remember *Crazed?* It was downbeat, cheap, and provided an earnest, if difficult, interpretation of psycho-sexual perversion. Now, imagine all of that, but subtract the "difficult" and add "confused." That's *Bits And Pieces,* a film from one-time/best-time director Leland Thomas, which translates simplicity into a far more palpable form of trash entertainment. This is groundless, majestic stupidity. Body oil. Too much bondage. A falling-in-love-on-a-beach montage. The phrase "apple ass." Frequent establishing shots. Jacuzzis. Camaros. Water-stained ceilings. Random guitar solos. And yes, a tense and violent climax. Sheeeiiit. (JZ)

# BLACK DEVIL DOLL FROM HELL (1984)

**Chester N. Turner**

We all know that if you have sex, you're headed straight to hell. We all know that if you defile the Bible, you're going straight to hell. So

what happens to Helen when she fucks a wooden puppet and throws her Bible in the trash?

Helen: “I didn’t know it could be this beautiful . . . it really happened . . . it was marvelous.”

Black Devil Doll: “How d’ya like that, bitch? I’m gonna give ya a lesson in pain! I’m gonna FUCK YOU!”

Helen: “Oh yes, my puppet!”

In an unknown bizarro world, Richard Pryor and John Waters got together over lunch, shot the shit, and left with a napkin-scrawled script. One camcorder later and you do the math. This is *Black Devil Doll From Hell,* the early SOV cesspool from the enigmatic Chester N. Turner. Easily the most vile, deranged, and hysterical film to ever be scored with a Casiotone, *Black Devil Doll’s* flamboyance cannot be overstated. Forget the tug between “good” and “bad” filmmaking; there’s nothing else like this anywhere on the planet. And there never will be again.

A quiet Sunday at mass. A curbside stereo salesman. A religious knick-knack montage. And Helen! Helen (Shirley L. Jones) is a God-fearing Catholic, forever suppressing her “fornicating” desires. After the chance discovery of a ventriloquist dummy in an antique shop, Helen lets loose. Enticed by the shopkeeper’s hard sell (“It will grant any heartfelt wish, and always returns to the store . . . “), Helen grabs the doll and heads for home. The doll sets up shop in his new digs – on top of the toilet. Helen massages his corn rows and wraps his arms in nylons, saying “These will make you a shade darker.” Helen soaps up in the shower and begins fantasizing about sex with her new friend. Suppress, Helen, SUPPRESS! Too late. That night, the Devil Doll awakens. Love is in the air.

Is it offensive? No question. Will I ever watch it again? I already have, at least four times. *Black Devil Doll* remains relentless in its unsettling hilarity, taking the baton from *555* and hitting new highs/lows in sustained SOV dirtiness. From the sex-infused religious morality to the lowest of low in extended, ghetto hump

scenes (boobs, sweat, puppet, nothing else), director Turner lays the skank on thick. Witness a little kid standing in for the doll's movements. Listen to extended disco jamz at hole-in-the-wall joint Elmo's Lounge. Marvel at pre-sex smoke bombs in Black Devil Doll's mouth. Shudder at a long, wet puppet tongue, covered in mayonnaise. Impossible to summarize and exhaustive overall, this is 1980s sleaze at its most engaging – filthy, but unthinkable to take at face value. The ultimate degenerate party film.

And what about Chester N. Turner himself? Mr. Turner went on to video-cam the life-enriching *Tales From The Quadead Zone* in 1987. Then he disappeared. Possibly, he stopped making films to do something "better." I guess we all have to make sacrifices for a higher cause. (JZ)

# BLÖDAREN (1983)

**Hans G. Hatwig**

The Rock Cats are coming to your town! They're on the cutting edge of Swedish heavy metal. They look a little like men but they are ladies. Swedish ladies who rock hard! Why would you want to kill them? Well, if you're crazy, the answer would be "Why not?" There's a man named Blödaren pushing a baby carriage around a series of deserted homes in the middle of the woods. He is a crazy man with long hair, male pattern baldness and a tendency to waggle his tongue a lot, The tongue waggling might be sexual but could be a condition. Blödaren kills The Rock Cats. He doesn't have to, but he does. It's just that sort of movie.

For the first 15-20 minutes, I believed this movie would be the best ever. It's SOV. It looks classy and the hand-held shots are very good. It's just a shame that no one decided to actually develop any part of the story beyond "Rock Cats hang out and mumble through dull conversations" and "they get chased by Blödaren." It feels like no one showed up to the shoot but the rockers and the killer. There is a guy in a canoe who gets involved near the end but it's not enough. In *Ogroff,* we kept meeting random characters. Then, *Ogroff* showed

up, chased people around and killed them. Boom! Imagine that there are only five people and the killer in that entire movie. The quintet loaf around a lot. The chases, when they finally start, go on long past the point where they are suspenseful or interesting. Quit imagining. That's *Blödaren.*

So, one must grab the bits of enjoyment that the film actually contains. The atmospheric, snow-covered opening sequence has a great feel to it, until the killer shows up and starts all the tongue-waggling. The initial telling of the legend behind the killer is nicely done. There is a scene with an insane woman who sits in a window and clutches a doll. That scared me. And a strange killing occurs under a large, exposed pipe beneath a house. The Rock Cats are somewhat charming but they have no distinct personalities. And they all look very similar. I had a tough time telling them apart. This isn't always a problem, except when the film gives us nothing else to do for minutes on end. (DB)

# BLOOD BEACH (1980)

**Jeffrey Bloom**

There is a beautiful beach. To get to the beautiful beach, one must cross long stretches of sand. Unfortunately, something very carnivorous is living under the sand and it's started pulling people in for lunch. The police are after it. The media is everywhere. How long will everyone have to stay off the beach?

Yes. That is *Blood Beach.* And the attack sequences are pretty great. The images of people being pulled into what should be ultra-safe sand to be devoured in bloody fashion should have made the film iconic, as the poster almost is. Even the rather vague discovery of the monster itself is an exciting sequence. By keeping the monster in the dark, we never quite see it in full and it becomes that much stranger. The lack of any explanation for its appearance, coupled with the ambiguous ending, make the monster portion of the film very strong.

But the rest of the movie needs to be just as strong for it to linger in the mind forever. You need strong characters that are charismatic or quirky or funny or something. Burt Young tries. But, he was better as a character named Gimpy in *Carnival Of Blood.* John Saxon is charming, as always. Sadly, the leading couple has already left my mind. I'd have to go back and look up their names and what exactly they did in the movie, which isn't going to happen today. In a film with show-stopping moments, all the other moments must also be superb or they must lead us towards the next attacks in an interesting fashion.

Everyone does their best to be as much of a "character" as they can, but it just doesn't hold. The scenes between the attacks just aren't very memorable. They're cliched and sometimes boring. I mentioned Burt Young and *Carnival Of Blood,* a movie that probably had one-tenth of the budget as *Blood Beach.* But, the sticking material in that one, the meat in between the killings, is as much fun as the killings. *Carnival* has a loopy, improvisational feeling in its character scenes. And, the majority of those scenes follow those who are going to be killed. The slightly amateur quality of everything makes it more viewable. *Blood Beach* is a professionally-shot production, but apart from the monster attacks, it seems like all of it was re-drafted from 70s cop shows.

I spent too much time in this movie waiting for the next attack. You may be better off just watching the poster for this one. It's awesome and promises so much. The movie delivers all that the poster promises. But, then it has to fill in another 70-75 minutes. (DB)

# BLOOD BEAT (1982)

**Fabrice A. Zaphiratos**

Never underestimate the power of a samurai-induced orgasm.

*Blood Beat* is an experimental semi-slasher that takes place during the Christmas season. Christmas has no connection to anything that's happening in the film. It's just there. There's a Christmas tree in one scene and several people reference the holidays. Then, a phantom samurai killer stabs people with his sword, which prompts protagonist Sarah to masturbate. Or have sex.

When each person dies, Sarah has triple orgasms. That's essentially what happens in this film. But that doesn't define it.

Siblings Ted and Dolly are home for the holidays. Mom is a painter. Her hands are literally possessed by ghosts. Stepdad Gary looks like Seymour Cassel circa *Minnie And Moskowitz.* That is, if Cassel wore nothing but camouflage. Ted says, "Hey, check out my guns!" in reference to actual guns, not biceps. He also skins a deer, but fails to convince Sarah, his girlfriend, to have sex. Sarah discovers a samurai helmet in an old chest. Lasers! Smoke! Pitch-shifted voices! The samurai comes to life. He glows like a guy from *Tron,* but does not wear bikini-briefs like *Samurai Cop.* Death (sword to the neck, face, wherever) and sex (Sarah and her orgasms) converge. There's also a waterbed with a humongous man in it, and a can of Tab is flung at the camera by a haunted kitchen.

*Blood Beat* feels like a constructivist photomontage. Everything settles at disparate angles, but the more you examine it, the more appropriate it seems. Unlike a majority of obscure 80s trash, this film doesn't force us to rely solely on humorous details for satisfaction.

It's not *Fatal Games* or *Twisted Nightmare.* Obviously, there are unintentionally comedic elements. But like *Disconnected,* there's more going on. *Blood Beat's* baffling lineage (shot in Hyde, Wisconsin, edited in Paris) aligns with its baffling logic. And that makes it attractive, more as an "experience" than a narrative film. In addition to the cryptic plot points and sexual absurdity, the film is immersed in artsy techniques. Duotone negatives. Unexplained slow motion. Music that sounds like a midnight jam session featuring a Moog, a stick hitting a fence, and a string quartet. The landscapes are cold and ugly, just like the sex. All of this keeps us at arm's length, but never pushes us away completely. We want to see what happens next, even if it makes no sense. And there's a power in that, too. (JZ)

# BLOOD CULT (1985)

**Christopher Lewis**

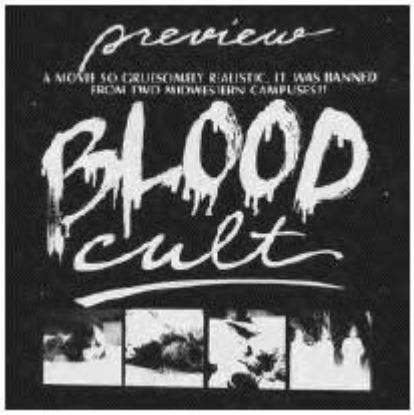
Every trend needs a defining trendsetter. In the case of SOV trash, it wasn't mullets or acid wash jeans or people riding ATVs. It was *Blood Cult.*

When *Blood Cult* hit home video rental stores, *Variety* billed it as "The first movie made for the home video market." The distributor was United Entertainment Pictures. United was a Tulsa, Oklahoma company specifically started by the late Bill Blair to produce and distribute SOV horror films on home video. In my interview with Blair, he said, "At the time, *Blood Cult* was a new item on the market. It was highly successful in its return." Although preempted by the release of *Boardinghouse, Sledgehammer,* and *Black Devil Doll From Hell,* the film still stakes a claim. Albeit a dull one.

We experience the longest slasher point-of-view opening ever conceived. I think it lasted for two hours. After that, we meet Sheriff Ron, a dead ringer for Harry Carrey by way of Charles

Nelson Reilly. He's on the trail of a sorority girl killer who wears Chuck Taylors and leaves tiny golden amulets on the body of each

victim. Of course, this prompts someone to say, “Could this be a Dungeons & Dragons game?!” Ron is having a tough time cracking the case, which is weird. You’d think that sitting around and talking would get the job done. Lucky for our hero, Tina is here. Tina is Ron’s daughter and she’s supposed to be in college. However, Tina is most likely forty-two years old. Due to her middle-age sleuthing skills, we find out that the slasher is killing to appease the Satanic god Caninus and collecting body parts as he goes. Graphic gore, endless conversations, and a preoccupation with salads are all that remain.




Agonizing pace aside, *Blood Cult* made its mark in a big way. Professionally shot and edited, it feels like a studio-backed slasher that just happens to be SOV. It’s different than something like *Black Devil Doll From Hell,* which feels like it was discovered in the dumpster of an abortion clinic. That’s probably why the film seemed so approachable when someone got it home and powered up the VCR. It looks good. It doesn’t feel like it comes from some filthy netherworld. Yet, that’s the very reason why it doesn’t hold up today. *Blood Cult* isn’t slick enough to complement theatrical releases like *The Prowler.* But it’s also not distinct enough to provide a lasting trash experience, like *Heavy Metal Massacre.* This is a tedious slasher with a tiny bit of fun. SOV or not, there’s no time for that when films like *Doctor Bloodbath* exist.

Thanks to *Blood Cult*’s success, United earned enough to fund two additional Blair/Lewis collaborations (next: *The Ripper;* later:

*Revenge: Blood Cult II).* This also laid the framework for the company's output during the remainder of the decade, including the distribution of *The Last Slumber Party.* So, if it wasn't for *Blood Cult,* there would be no Chris. Think about that. (JZ)

# BLOOD FRENZY (1987)

**Hal Freeman**

If you enjoyed *The Dream Team* (group therapy field trip) and *The Hills Have Eyes* (rape on an RV), you're in luck. *Blood Frenzy* is a combination of both, with the addition of neon-laced Reebok high-tops. And a guy that orgasms in four seconds.

In a pre-credit prologue, a kid gouges his abusive father's throat with hedge clippers. He then picks up a jack-in-the-box, twirls the knob, and voila – *Blood Frenzy* is underway! Six emotionally unstable patients (slut, prude, lesbo, 'Nam vet, chauvinist, and alcoholic, respectively) join their doctor out in the desert for some "confrontational therapy." After much yelling, colorful profanity ("Ya pussy bumper!") and sex that we don't see, a killer begins slashing throats in a most explicit fashion. A victim punctuates his death with Shemp Howard yelps. The characters sometimes call each other by the wrong names. The climax was full of torture and gruesomeness. Most of this happens in a cave.

*Blood Frenzy* is the sole non-porn outing from director Hal Freeman. For that reason, I'm willing to cut it some slack. The editing is hilariously misguided, with abrupt cuts that chop off dialogue and lots of delayed reactions. The pace begins to drag after an hour and we approach snoozefest territory. The killer walks around some sand dunes. Everyone tries to find him. Luckily, those sequences don't last long, and there's always something to admire in terms of fashion (leather tiger print pants with sequins) and dialogue ("You have to SHAAARE your feelings, everyone").

According to scriptwriter Ted Newsom, a completed script called *Warning, No Trespassing* was placed in his hands. He then

refashioned that script as a halfway point between H.G. Lewis' *Blood Feast* and Alfred Hitchcock's *Frenzy.* To my eyes, the finished film version of *Blood Frenzy* resembles *Blood Feast* and *Frenzy* no more than it resembles Frank Capra's *It Happened One Night.* It's simply an enthusiastic slasher with a lot of screaming and notably terrible acting. And Lisa Loring. Lisa Loring played "Wednesday" on *The Addams Family* TV show. She attempted a comeback with this film, prior to her starring role in *Iced.* You can't ask for much more than that. Except, maybe, *Iced.* (JZ)

# BLOOD HARVEST (1985)
# aka NIGHTMARE

**Bill Rebane**

Tiny Tim is kneeling at an altar, weeping, and covered in clown make-up. He's sweaty. I've been waiting my whole life for this scene.

The late Tiny Tim was in Wisconsin for a beer tent carnival appearance during the summer of '85. He probably performed a version of "Tiptoe Through The Tulips" with a drum machine and saxophones. Bill Rebane was in the audience. A deal was made. Then, elastic pants were purchased and greasepaint was applied. In a few short months, *Blood Harvest* was shot in Lincoln

County, Wisconsin. When watching it, please make sure that you have an extra pair of pants. Because you will be shitting the ones you have on now.

Jill is home from college. After foreclosing the mortgages on several properties, her parents have disappeared. The family's home is the victim of graffiti and obscene phone calls. It's not clear why. Gary, Jill's childhood friend, is in love with her. He also has a brother named "Merv," "Mervo," or my favorite, "The Magnificent Mervo." As interpreted by Tiny Tim, Mervo is a bloated man-child in a stretch-satin suit and flannel shirt. He spews disquieting songs ("I wanna make the whole world laugh, even if the laugh's on me") and recites Hail Marys. Jill becomes nude quite frequently. A pessimist sheriff

wears a softball uniform. A killer who wears pantyhose over his head has a Polaroid fetish. Gary makes love to Jill while she's unconscious. At this point, you can probably just think up anything and pretend that it happens.

Joining *A Night To Dismember* and *Boardinghouse* as go-to examples for cinematic madness, *Blood Harvest* will knock you flat. It's not enough that Bill Rebane called an about-face on his typical PG-themed endurance tests *(The Game, Invasion From Inner Earth).* Atypical for him, this film is filled with flopping tits and brutal violence. These are welcome additions. They guarantee consciousness. But Rebane pushed the film even further, throwing in the hideous Tiny Tim, pointless religious motifs, and an overall sense of charmlessness. No one is likable. Homes are so unkempt that they look as if they were abandoned six months ago. Sex happens on filthy shag carpeting when it shouldn't be happening at all. All of this is presented with thick Wisconsin accents and a random application of jump cuts – a benchmark of Rebane's particular brand of flair. It's depressing, confusing, and exhausting. It also receives my highest recommendation. (JZ)

# BLOOD LAKE (1987)

**Tim Boggs**

There are vacations and there are VACATIONS. When some bros from Oklahoma grabbed a camcorder and documented their weekend trip, the seas parted (literally) and peace fell over the universe. Yes, it actually happened. I'm holding a copy of *Blood Lake* right now.

Distributed by SOV pioneers United Entertainment Pictures, *Blood Lake* is the most stupefied SOV horror film that ever was. In fact, I was so afraid that the characters' traits were going to rub off on my own day-to-day mannerisms that I was forced to split the film into two separate viewings. Simultaneously, I laughed so hard that bitter tears ran down my cheeks. Yes, bitter. Something so depressing has no right to be this good.

Just like *Sledgehammer, Blood Lake* follows the adventures of some people on a party weekend. There's a raunchy old house, beer and pot, and quaint slang such as "muff diving." At the 50-minute mark, a killer appears. He's dressed in cowboy boots and a purple shirt with a rose stitched on the back. When he kills people, we can't see what's going on. The motive for the killings? Unpaid real estate debt. Yes. A killer is on the loose because of bills.

Before the killer shows up, *Blood Lake* devotes its endless establishing shots and choppy editing to a day in the life of our heroes – six teens with good ol' boy accents and the white Reebok high-tops to match. It's a twisted form of video vérité and it all boils down to this: water skiing footage, locker room innuendoes, sleeping, partying, a game of quarters, a gratuitous Laffun Head cameo, and Lil' Tony. Lil' Tony is a mulleted, pre-teen wise-ass with no leg hair and one thing on his mind: NAILIN' CHICKS. Anytime he opens his mouth ("I choose you as my sex partner"), you'll wish you were hanging out with him. At the same time, the cast mumbles through lines like "You fags givin' up alreaaaady?" and "Dude, you twisted the pretzel!" Everyone talks at once, kind of like *Nashville.* Soundtrack hits like "Thru-Out The Nite" and "Was It Real" are played by fret-squeelers/sax-blowers/ drum-fill-flubbers Voyager. The credit roll ends with: "Dry Lake Special Visual Effects By An Act Of God."

Tim Boggs does wonderful work. (JZ)

# BLOOD MASSACRE (1988)

### Don Dohler

I watched *Bodycount* and *Blood Massacre* on a Saturday night. To the average reader, the response is, “So what?” To the person who knows these films, the response might be, “Hmm, bet that was an interesting evening.” To my mother, the response would be, “You’re so good with numbers; why don’t you give up this writing and become an accountant? Your Uncle Paul is an actuary and he makes a lot of money.” All three are valid, for what they’re worth, but that second one is the good one.

I put on *Bodycount.* Immediately, it was obvious that this was going to be one of those 1980s SOVs that try to look like a regular film. *555* and *Blood Cult* are two good examples. That’s not necessarily a bad thing, so I kept watching. A couple run into a park for smooching and are shot. An in-depth police investigation begins. This isn’t a horror movie. It’s a thriller. Sadly, it’s a pretty bland thriller that goes on and on. At the climax, my tape seized up. I never saw the ending. I was cheesed off for 37 seconds and then I put on *Blood Massacre.*

*Blood Massacre* is a film by Don Dohler. I would call myself a minor fan of Dohler’s work. I love *Fiend* but I don’t really go crazy for his other films. I fully expected to have an amusing 72 minutes and be on my way. I thought the review would end with “If you’re like me, you’ll want to watch it and it’s not bad.” The movie opens in a bar where everyone is unattractive. A sleazy man named Rizzo walks in. Something about the film is a little off. It’s the look or the feel or something but it made the film seem like a dream. All the music and dialogue is muffled but the sound effects are REALLY LOUD. Then, we’re at a farmhouse in the middle of nowhere. A young woman drives up, meets the nice family that lives there and rents a room. Back to Rizzo and Friends! They are robbers. They go in a video store with guns blazing. The robbers and the family eventually meet up. As you might expect, things go awry.

*Blood Massacre* has some good twists and turns. I don't want to ruin them. But, when it seems like it's about to grind to a halt, the way the characters respond to events keeps it moving. Something that seemed like a low budget goof-up turns out to be clever plotting. When the final freeze frame hit, I let out a "Yeahhh!" My dog looked at me. My cat took off. My wife requested that I keep it down. She'd fallen asleep during the opening credits.

Some of this film's success has to do with the length. An odd movie can have a tough time keeping up its indefinable antics over an extended period. For example, *Don't Go In The Woods* flags a little while the sheriff wanders around. *Bodycount* was at the 92 minute mark when my tape seized up. It was still going. *Blood Massacre* is 72 minutes and that is perfect. If a film is bland, brevity is the key to making it worth watching until the end. If a film is weird, brevity makes sure that the oddness stays firmly packed. It also makes the film much more re-watchable. In the end, this is exactly what I'm after. A wall of great, weird movies that can be enjoyed again and again. (DB)

# BLOOD RAGE (1983)
# aka NIGHTMARE AT SHADOW WOODS

**John Grissmer**

When I was sixteen, The Angry Samoans were a hot jam. They had a song called "The Todd Killings." *Blood Rage* has a killer in it named Todd. For at least two days following my viewing of *Blood Rage,* I couldn't get "The Todd Killings" out of my head. Nostalgia works in beautiful ways.

Terry and Todd are twin brothers with awesome names. Their mom (Holy shit, it's Louise Lasser!) looks like a corpse and probably licks ashtrays for breakfast. Mom and her weasel boyfriend have a steamy interlude at the drive-in – in front of Terry and Todd. So, the brothers leave the comforts of their station wagon. Terry has plans.

Terry murders a couple with an ax and pins the deed on Todd. Before we know it, it's TEN YEARS LATER. Terry is eighteen and balding. He lives with his mom in a shitty condo, which is part of a ten-acre community called Shadow Woods. During Thanksgiving dinner, Terry spills the beans – Todd has escaped from the mental institution. Gore flows. Bodies pile up. But who, exactly, is the crazy one? It's a case of mistaken identity! Terry gets violent, but everyone thinks it's Todd. Mom hits the vodka.

A horny couple pulls an elaborate practical joke instead of having sex. Terry smokes pot and takes a piss break between killings.

Released theatrically and on video as *Blood Rage* in 1983, this film was trimmed of gore and then re-released in theaters and on home video as *Nightmare At Shadow Woods* in 1987. That information is almost as boring as it is inconsequential, so let's move on to the good stuff. Namely, this is a sloppily edited, violently hilarious good time. When I watch it, the comforting nostalgia of early 80s slasher-trash materializes before my eyes. It's cheap, but only semi-inept. The synths are huge. Inserted scenes of naked people pop up, then

repeat later in the film. Two dudes in full denim outfits accept the challenge of Advanced Pole Position. A woman wears a leopard skin bathing suit and dances with her Walkman at the pool. Terry gets a little annoying towards the end, particularly in the one-liner department. But check out his bouffant. It's wonderful. (JZ)

# BLOOD SISTERS (1987)

**Roberta Findlay**

Lackadaisical.

That's the only word I could come up with when reaching the end of *Blood Sisters.* Even a viewing of one of the most boring slashers of all time, *Girls School Screamers,* makes me say, "That was not without its charms." With *Blood Sisters,* I come away with nothing because it doesn't present me with anything.

As the closing credits rolled, I watched the cast names scroll by. First names only. Name after name of character after character and I could not match any of the names with any of the characters. That seems like a mistake to me. I thought that maybe giving everyone surnames might have helped. Then, I dismissed that idea because, frankly, it was kind of dumb.

Sorority gals are taken to a "haunted" house in the middle of nowhere to spend the night. Will there be shenanigans of a sexual nature? Will there be spiritual visitations? Will there be a killer? Sure. Why not? These gals wander around aimlessly. Eventually, they start seeing the images of prostitutes who used to inhabit this home. Then, the killings begin.

The best parts of the movie are the prostitute visitations. One of the gals will pick up an item, such as a negligee, and suddenly see a prostitute and her john in a mirror. The couple in the mirror have sex. The sorority gal watches and gets very turned on. The juxtaposition of the young woman getting worked up and the couple from the past in the mirror is sexy. The killings, however, make me sleepy. The

very end scene has some resonance but, really, how could it not? Much of this horror adventure is just assembling people in a location and pointing a camera at them. When I watch this film, I get the feeling that this was made by people who could make a movie but just didn't care. I could be wrong. They could have cared so much that it hurts them to read this but somehow I doubt it. A movie made badly with verve is one thing. A movie made blandly without life stains my trousers in an unnameable fashion. (DB)

# BLOODSTREAM (1985)

**Michael J. Murphy**

In the opening scene of *Bloodstream,* a man screams a lot and rips his flesh off. It's a scene from a low-budget film-within-a-film that is also called *Bloodstream.* The film is being viewed in the offices of a distributor named William King. King tells the filmmaker, Alistair, that the film is garbage. Then, King immediately begins distributing *Bloodstream* on his own. The filmmaker takes violent revenge upon King and King's associates. Alistair dresses in a black robe with a skull mask. He films everything with a Bolex. Alistair doesn't seem incredibly stable to begin with. He doesn't get better as the movie approaches its end.

In one respect, this movie is Michael J. Murphy's *8½,* or his *Stardust Memories,* his *Cat In The Brain.* Like those films, *Bloodstream* finds Murphy exploring his personal demons through a film about making a film. In one scene, William King watches Murphy's film *Invitation To Hell.* He says it is rubbish. The distributor is a terrible guy who spends all of his time ripping people off. The actors that King employs are vain and talentless. After brushing against this world, Alistair descends into madness. Murphy seems to have created *Bloodstream* to fantasize about killing off people who have given him a hard time. I can't blame him. If you have access to the film equipment, it's a lot saner and safer than actually killing.

On the other hand, Murphy could be using portions of his own background to tell a story about violent videos causing a man to go

insane. Excerpts from a lot of these videos are shown, including *Son Of Mummy, Cry Werewolf,* and *Zombie Lust.* My guess is that these are the best scenes from Murphy's short films. A man with a sack over his head wielding an axe chases a couple through the woods. A mummy squeezes a man's head until it bleeds. A disfigured man dressed as a jester is stabbed. A couple is eaten by zombies. There is a violent post-apocalyptic fight in a warehouse. Alistair is shown staring blank-eyed at the TV. Movie after movie plays. Eventually, he goes out and kills with a camera.

I think *Bloodstream* is Murphy's most engaging film. *The Last Night* and *The Hereafter* have their moments but go on too long. *Invitation To Hell* is short, gory and very entertaining. But, the glimpses that *Bloodstream* gives us into Murphy's life is something that fascinates me. The constant flow of scenes from the movies Alistair watches promise a world of low-budget horror that we may never see released. Whether or not *Bloodstream* is Murphy living vicariously through Alistair or just giving Alistair some of his biography in a tale of videos driving a man insane, I can't say for certain. But, I choose the former. A man going crazy from watching violent videos isn't as compelling to me because anyone could make it. Autobiography that ends in a lot of fantasy killing is more personal. (DB)

# BLOOD TRACKS (1985)

**Mats Helge**

If it was 1985 and you were in a band called Easy Action, what would it take to change your name to Solid Gold? Easy Action is a wink-wink to the groupies, informing them that you and your bandmates

are both available and willing. On the other hand, Solid Gold relates to the general public for certain that “we write the hits.” Fame or fornication? A tough question. This is one of the many philosophical conundrums that arise in *Blood Tracks.* To Sweden!

A man is drunk. He wants a candy bar. Naturally, his wife stabs him in the back. Gathering their six (eight? twenty?) children, the woman hops a train and never looks back.

Twenty years later. The rock band Solid Gold (Easy Action in real life – see what I mean?) is filming a new video on a mountaintop in the dead of winter. The video kicks off when the entire band rolls down a hill. The girls are almost naked. The microphones are not plugged in. Regardless, lyrics like “Blood tracks! You’re in the danger zone!” provide enough sass to cause an AVALANCHE. Trapped in a cabin, the band, their management, and the groupies are forced to have sex, communicate on walkie-talkies, and die in loads of ever-escalating gore. The killer? I thought you’d never ask. Our prologue family, now reduced to deformed, cannibalistic savages, are holed up in an abandoned factory, the very same place that Solid Gold’s manager picked for the video shoot. The family seizes this opportunity to exorcise their animosity towards mankind. This is all very fascinating.

The 80-minute, Swedish-produced *Blood Tracks* will make you happy. Only bettered by the noble social commentary, the hilarious technical shanks are almost too good to be true. There are no character names – even the credits list only the actors themselves. The film is post-dubbed by people who are not comfortable with the act of speech. Lazer Tag synths hum endlessly. The pace moves like greased lightning, but really, nothing much happens, save for the booby-trap gore. When one of the Solid Gold dudes tells his mutt-faced lover, “You’ve got the boobs!,” it’s time for another avalanche. This time, it occurs in your heart. (JZ)

# BLOODY MOON (1980)

**Jesus Franco**

On the seventh day, God rested. On the eighth day, Jesus Franco made a slasher. It was a very good week.

In December of 1985, the British government released the DPP39 “Video Nasty” list. Thirty-nine controversial trash-horror films ranging from *Night Of The Bloody Apes* to *Unhinged* were banned, and instantly elevated to near-urban legend status. Jesus “Jess” Franco, being no stranger to perversion with films such as *The Erotic Rites Of Frankenstein,* made the list.

JEFF HARDING
MICHAEL FITZPATRICK
NAOMI KANEDA
IN
BLOOD TRACKS
ALSO STARING
BRAD POWELL
PETER MERRILL
HARRIET ROBINSON
WITH
TINA SHAW,
FRANCES KELLY,
KARINA LEE,
HELENA JACKS
WRITTEN BY:
MIKE JACKSON
DIRECTED BY:
MIKE JACKSON
YOUNG AND BEAUTIFUL, THEY CAME FOR A DAY THE TERROR STRUCK, AND THEY STAYED TO DIE
"THE FIRE WILL BURN TO THE FINAL ATTACK"

*Bloody Moon* was produced to cash in on the American slasher volcano. According to Brewster, Fenton, and Morris's *Shock! Horror!,* the film made the DPP39 due to "shots of blood-on-breasts and an unforgettable scene involving decapitation by circular saw." That's all well and good, but this is Jess Franco we're talking about. *Bloody Moon* is not *Final Exam* or *Silent Madness. Bloody Moon* is sis 'n' bro incest, a soundtrack inspired by Herb Alpert, Bill Haley & The Comets, and Sparks (often at the same time), and a little kid who gets run over by a Rolls-Royce.

At “The International Youth Club Boarding School of Languages,” a group of girls learn Spanish, hang out topless by a pool, attend the “Disco Club,” and lust after Antonio, the gardener/ tennis instructor. The headmistress, who sits in a wheelchair and yells a lot, will be leaving a large fortune to her children after passing. Her children, the incest couple (she: a priss in purple spandex, he: meatloaf-faced killer), obviously have a few issues. But what of the retarded handyman? The girl who pretends to make love by herself in the name of social equality? The Grace Jones sweatshirt?

“As they say, suffering is good for pleasure!”

*Bloody Moon* has “Property Of J. Franco” written all over it. That’s why it’s so appealing. But, there’s no Dracula humping and no Frankenstein whipping. Just a bunch of hula-hoop synth sound effects, stylish photographic urgency, insanely poor dubbing, and yes, even a little comforting monotony, all wrapped up in the guise of a cheap American slasher. This film wields the familiarity of our beloved trash-slashers. But thanks to Franco’s personal flair, the end result is always exotic and rarely conventional.

On the ninth day, Jesus Franco rested. But only for a moment. (JZ)

# BLOODY VIDEO HORROR THAT MADE ME PUKE ON MY AUNT GERTRUDE (1989)

**Zachary Winston Snygg aka John Bacchus**

If you need a step-by-step guide on how to connect a VCR and a TV, you’ve come to the right place. Because that happens for a full two minutes in this movie.

The title is pure hyperbole. In my case, the “hook” worked. I watched *Bloody Video Horror That Made Me Puke On My Aunt Gertrude.* It was a SOV film with some horror (a dismemberment via handsaw occurs offscreen), a bit of puke (a hobo barfs on a clown’s shoes), and no sign of Aunt Gertrude. People struggled to make up lines on the spot. Teens with bad facial hair pretended to be adults.

Interrogation scenes droned on without the benefit of a single edit. I was not happy about any of this.

Ramon is a clerk at Video Magic. He's like a red-headed Ben Affleck, if Ben Affleck grew up in Staten Island and wore velvet workout pants. Joe is the owner of Video Magic. Vaseline from his hair drips onto Ramon's detective magazine. Joe convinces Ramon to watch a porno *(Candy Cunts In A Corner)* at his apartment.

Once there, Ramon hooks up a VCR to a TV, but leaves before the porno starts. Joe presses play. Oh shit! Instead of *Candy Cunts,* Joe gets a snuff video, one that we saw being filmed earlier by Hassan. Hassan wears a large fake beard and talks like Peter Sellers in *The Party.* From there, Ramon becomes falsely accused, a man eats an apple, and the technique of placing two people against a wall and having them talk is fully explored.

When teenagers pick up a camera to make a trash-horror film, special things can happen. Things like Nathan Schiff's *Long Island Cannibal Massacre* and Tim Ritter's *Day Of The Reaper.* Schiff and Ritter's lack of life experiences led them to create films that were disconnected from the world of adults. That's what makes them so engaging and fresh. These films resulted from the unchecked creativity of the young minds that created them. *Bloody Video* goes the other way. It's what happens when teenagers get obsessed with recreating their favorite scenes from films by Sam Raimi and Brian DePalma.

That's not to say that no one was trying. There's plenty of creativity behind the camera. Artsy shots through partially closed doors and underneath glass. Swooping, *Evil Dead*-style camera movements that appear to originate from on top of radio controlled cars. A Casio soundtrack that combines the classical stylings of *Death Race 2000,* the western bop of *Gunsmoke,* and someone holding down a single note for thirty seconds. This is a home movie that most likely meant the world to the people who created it, but means little to us in terms of entertainment. Everything takes too long, the in-jokes grate, and there's no sense of organization. I was bored after twenty minutes.

Still, kudos to these kids for convincing a girl with a purple mohawk to take off her clothes and stand in front of the camera. (JZ)

# BLUE MURDER (1985)

**Charles Wiener**

A reporter named Dan. A cop named Rossi. A priest. A "businessman" named Markham. A screw of pornographers (that is the collective noun used for pornographers). Peter Bailey, just some guy. A killer with a clown mask. A theme song. That's *Blue Murder* in a nutshell.

This film was distributed by Video 2 Video. And, they made one hell of a trailer for it on my *Bounty Hunters* tape. The trailer was at Sleaze Factor Five. I was ready for anything. Why did they let me down so hard? In *Blue Murder*'s defense, a straightforward thriller is not the usual genre of film I'll walk a long mile for. This is an over-complicated (to its credit), bland (not to its credit), wishy-washy (to no one's credit) film.

Overcomplicated: There are lots of characters. Lots of suspicious people creeping – or just standing – around. Lots of talking heads. For about half of the film, I was carried along by the fact that I didn't quite know where everything was going. It all felt like it would be a far more satisfying adventure than it turned out to be. But, as I was thinking these good thoughts, I somehow knew that it would let me down. The biggest downfall here was that I picked out the killer immediately and all this endless narrative subterfuge was thrown in my face, presumably, to make me forget that. And, you know what? It worked . . . for a time.

Bland: It has that slightly ghosty look of a film that was SOV and transferred to film. That look is an automatic deterrent to a film being spectacular. So, the film needs to do something incredible and make the viewer: 1. Forget the rotten look of the thing, or 2. Make the presentation one of the many glorious elements it offers. *Blue Murder* doesn't make it. It has a few moments that work, such as the

reveal of the killer's fireplace/mantelpiece, but most of it is just people sitting around in rooms or by pools. I am a fan of rooms. I am a fan of pools. Put a pool in a room, you'll see a happy man. But, none of this is really that interesting and it's all just competent enough to make a series of sighs emanate from this viewer.

Wishy-Washy: It's a film about a crazy man in a clown mask who wants to stop all pornography. And, yes, he does include prostitutes. I know. He's nuts! What can I tell you? So, if this is the premise, why does the average episode of *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit* have more sleaze in it? Bored-looking women in bikinis and gals in granny panties are not my idea of erotic. Maybe the killer wanted all the porno stopped because it was so incredibly boring. The climax seems like it might go to a sleazy place but then it opts out and just ends.

I get the feeling that these moviemakers were like the *Blood Cult* folks who wanted to make professional looking entertainment for the home video market. It's admirable, definitely. But why not shoot for the stars and make something really wonderful, creative and moving? Why make the sort of thing that *Kojak* or *McCloud* used to do for free and with more resources on TV back in the mid-70s? Or was this just what they thought "videophiles" wanted to watch? If so, as a card-carrying Videophiles of America (VOA) member, I am insulted. (DB)

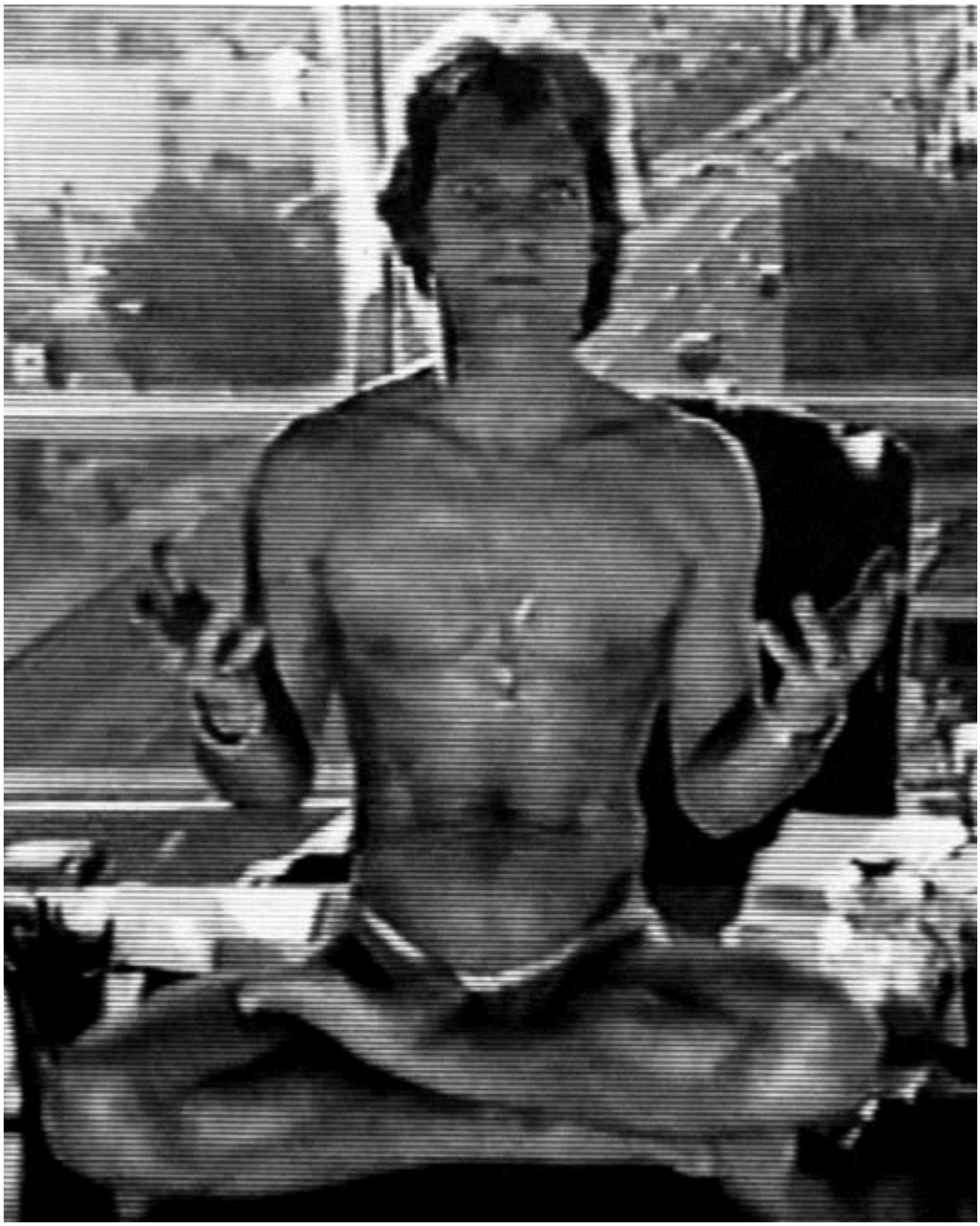
# BOARDINGHOUSE (1982)

**John Wintergate**

Does this film even exist?

May, 1984. A handful of teens pile into a drive-in outside of Long Island, New York. That night, they steam up the windows while taking in one of the first SOV films to ever be shown theatrically, horror or otherwise. The film was *Boardinghouse,* which grabs its cut of cinematic history by being the very first full-length SOV horror film, even garnering screenings on New York's 42nd Street with its

transferred-to-film print. Initially released on Beta and VHS as *House Geist* by Ariel Video in 1982, it would see release under four different companies, ending up with a 1985 release by Paragon. To call this LA-shot film insane would be an understatement. Unless you're wearing a thong while saying it.



*Boardinghouse* is the story of Jim (writer-director John Winter-gate), a psychic/gigolo/meditator in a leopard-print g-string. Jim rents out a cursed house to “beautiful women with no ties” aka a never-ending supply of primo 80s slutz. What follows are killings, lots of sex hijinks, and an amazing amount of weirdness: pie fights, a nightmare involving a severed pig’s head, Mattel synth blurps, awful fake British accents, an attacking refrigerator, suicide, and the gimmick of

“Horror Vision,” which signals upcoming violence with a neon swirl and a silhouette of a black glove. Then, we have Jim’s intense psychic declarations (“FOCUS! WHITE LIGHT!”) while wearing a thong and sitting cross-legged.

This is a film that slipped away from a world where this sort of thing happens all the time. It’s cinema with human beings in it but possibly not made by human beings. Maybe it comes from the duck world that *Howard The Duck* comes from? It’s what they think humans get up to on average days. Regardless, this is a an entertaining and important film that isn’t a favorite. In theory, it’s one of the best around. And yet, its proneness for repeat viewings lands nowhere near *The Last Slumber Party* or *Don’t Go In The Woods* or *Ogroff,* thanks to: 1. A 98 minute run time, and 2. A lack of consistency. Really.

Watch the first 10 minutes. They have everything you could ever want in a trash-horror film. Now, watch the scene much later on the beach where a woman gets clubbed in the head with a rock. Apart from a strange line reading, the death of that woman is rather grotesque and off-putting. Just like the first ten minutes. What do these two bits have in common? No Kalassu.

Kalassu is the wife of John Wintergate. Most of the people in the film, including John/Jim, look like they’re making a horror movie. They may be having fun, but they’re attempting to bring some gravity to the situation. Now, watch when Kalassu shows up. Charming, yes. Attractive, yes. Having fun, she sure is! However, she isn’t buying a minute of it. She’s there to hang out and have a good time and rock all the hot ones by the poolside in her band, 33⅓. The other people can try and act like they’re in a horror movie but when she’s on the screen, everyone’s goofing around. So, there are two movies going on here: The one about all the strangeness and killings, and the one about Kalassu and her band (with in-jokes galore). Both movies are fun to watch. But, when your lead is goofing around all the time, it’s tough to see anything but a series of scenes. There’s no build. There’s no drive. That’s not a bad thing. But once we cross the 90

minute line, the novelty of out-to-lunch insanity – no matter how glorious – tends to flatline. (JZ/DB)

# BODY COUNT (1987)
# aka CAMPING DEL TERRORE

### Ruggero Deodato

I am going to entice you to this movie with three sweet words: Naked Fat Guy.

This movie features a scene with a naked fat guy named Sid running into a middle-aged couple's kitchen. He thinks they're having an orgy. They're actually having a quiet dinner. Sid is nude. He's big. The couple seems only mildly peeved and I, frankly, couldn't stop watching Sid's pickle flap around. Too much information? Of course. Too little might make you ignore this fun but standard slasher from Ruggero Deodato, the director of *Cannibal Holocaust.*

*Body Count* is an attempt by Italian filmmakers to replicate an American slasher of the 1980s. It does seem odd that the Italians' biggest innovation is the dongs of fat men. You'd think there would be more going on in this film. You think I would have watched it and yelled, "That's how you make a slasher!" But, it's just very straightforward. It's got some eerie music from Claudio Simonetti, some lovely shots of the woods and a series of interchangeable characters who are so wonderfully annoying that I thought, "Boy, Americans are a bunch of assholes. Hey! Wait a minute!" I did keep mixing up which woman was which and the guys don't have a lot to distinguish them either.

So, we're in the woods. David Hess is there. An "Indian shaman" may or may not be killing two groups of campers. It took four writers to put this script together. Marcel Proust wrote *In Search Of Lost Time* on his own. Dennis Potter wrote all six hours of *The Singing Detective* by himself. I would love to know what exactly the contributions of these four writers were. Of course, it may not be four

names in the credits. It may be one long name that I'm misreading. This guy could be the John Jacob Jingleheimer Schmidt of Italy.

I'd put this one in the realm of *Berserker* or *Memorial Valley Massacre.* It's competently made and fun to watch but not absolutely superb. This is strange, considering its lineage. Deodato's name does not mean that this is the *Cannibal Holocaust* of slashers. This movie won't change your world view but it will flap a weiner at you. (DB)

# BODYCOUNT (1985)

**Lionel Shenken**

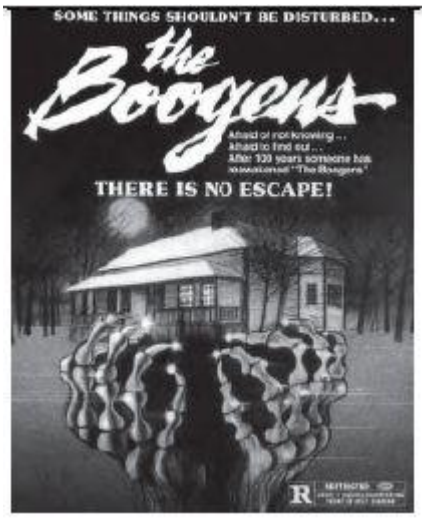
*Bodycount* is the only film in this book that forced me to scream

"GET THE FUNK OUT!" at my television screen. But it didn't work.

Credit roll. Sweaty dive bar. A funk band farts out a *Bodycount* theme song. This isn't Ruggero Deodato's *Body Count,* which was a discordant slasher that benefited from the cosmopolitan assholery of David Hess. No, this *Bodycount* is yet another SOV depression fit from Canada's Emmeritus Productions. After sitting through it, I understand why Hess is more.

*Bodycount* feels like a Wendy's employee training tape, but not as engaging. The listless story concerns a Magnum-armed serial killer with cancer, the sex life of a taxi cab driver, and a dirty cop who says, "I had a shitty day" a bunch of times. There's also a waterbed. Director Lionel Shenken enjoys his dolly shots. A credit reads "MUSIC BY PAUL ZAZA', but we all know that "The Za" just stuck a mic in front of Conky from *Pee-Wee's Playhouse* and said, "Ok fella, go nuts". Since all of this stuff just grinds around in numbing circles for 95 minutes, I had to focus on something else. Namely, Avec Video's VHS cover art.

What is that? Seriously. What is it? A bird's eye view of a space shuttle exhaust system? A woman's lingerie-clad thigh? My aunt's kitchen table circa 1992? Purple grid lines overlay cut-outs of humans pointing to the sky. They reach. Towards heaven? Does this mean that the Executive Creative Director at Avec Video found spiritual salvation in the form of *Bodycount?* If so, did he or she feel that this was the most appropriate forum to share that? It's something to think about. (JZ)




# THE BOOGENS (1981)

**James L. Conway**

Sixty years ago, a series of mysterious disappearances caused the closure of a silver mine. But the excitement of making a nice profit has opened it up again. Two mineworkers and their girlfriends find themselves under siege from strange creatures deep in the earth. These creatures have been christened, possibly unwisely, Boogens.

*The Boogens* is well produced, well acted, and well done all the way around. It builds slowly, piece by piece, taking time to develop its characters so we care about them. The locations, always snowy and cold, are excellent. You can feel that no one really wants to be outside except to ski or sled. When one of the miners has to get up in the middle of the night to fetch some equipment, he didn't want to get up and I didn't want him to get up. The monsters gradually appear and the tension builds and builds. People die. Things explode. The film accomplishes exactly what it's supposed to accomplish.

Repetition can be an issue. The majority of the films in this book are those that we can watch over and over again. They're like great albums where repeated listenings increase the joy and the appeal. But there are some films that work best the first time; that are truly

meant to be enjoyed and then wave you on your way. *The Boogens* is one of these.

*The Boogens* moves very slowly, peeling away its mysteries. What is a Boogen? You'll find out but the film won't rush you there. There aren't a lot of characters so there aren't a lot of killings. Much of the film relies on atmosphere, such as the cabin, the mine, the snowy world. But, maybe it's a bit too heavy on the atmospheric. Possibly a little too heavy on folks creeping around. But I previously said that the film did everything it was supposed to do. What do I want, exactly? Useless characters creeping around just to get killed? Less creeping around in general? Fewer atmospherics?

These elements fail on repeated viewings because they rely on us not knowing what's going to happen. When we know what's going to happen and we know that there isn't going to be a lot of exposition, it feels very different. We know that all the build-up is going to lead us to the same cave of monsters and one long look at them. The first time you watch it, it isn't until the credits start to roll that you think, "What was going on there?" You get a little disappointed because the entire atmosphere just built up to some running around and explosions. On the second viewing, everything's out in the open. The film is too well-made to go the "Crazy Movie" route that many films in this book careen down. Barring craziness, a little bit more complexity would have made this one of my favorites. (DB)

# THE BOOGEYMAN (1980)

**Ulli Lommel**

An analyst once surmised that my lifelong obsession with trash-horror films was simply a substitute for confronting the "horrific" hurdles in my life. I bought it.

Soon after, I was laid off for the second time in two years. I felt like watching a movie that night. Yet, instead of reaching for *City Lights* or *My Man Godfrey* or *The Lady Eve,* I went over to Dan's house and we watched *The Boogeyman.* Then, we watched *Boogeyman II.*

Today, I'm either a part-time nut or the most well-adjusted man in Los Angeles. But that no longer matters. Because I'm happy. And there's a good chance you'll be happy too if you watch *The Boogeyman* and see a priest get killed by haunted mirrors and a dude in a TRIUMPH shirt. Who needs therapy?

Lacey, that's who.

Twenty years ago, Lacey witnessed her brother Willy stab a guy wearing pantyhose on his head. It sounds awesome because it is awesome. From there, grown-up and tormented Lacey shares a farm with her grounded husband, goofy kid, boring grandma, passive-aggressive grandpa, and mute Willy. Surprisingly, they don't do much. So Lacey visits her therapist, Dr. John Carradine. Then her husband says, "Lacey, let's get ridda these ghosts . . . once and for all!" Suddenly, mirrors are painted black, inanimate objects are killing random people (including priests), and TRIUMPH is seen but not heard. That's where the synths come in.

The ins 'n' outs of *The Boogeyman* are trivial. It's not a slasher, though it tries hard to be one (kind of like *Superstition).* The trajectory is slick but haphazard. There are killings with a bit of gore. I fall asleep every time I watch it. So why do I watch it? Again: that's where the synths come in.

The soundtrack was composed by Tim Krog and his "band" Synthe-Sound-Trax. Krog thickens *The Boogeyman* with some of the most addictive analog synths since Wendy Carlos' work on *A Clockwork Orange.* Or whoever programmed the Moog arpeggios for *Unhinged* – take your pick. That's what does it. At a base level, *The Boogeyman* is a smart-yet-unexceptional supernatural horror film. It simply makes you smile. But then you REALLY see it. And hear it. And you get a little more. The synths converge with lovely open spaces. Shadows are heavy and greenery is thick. A mood is achieved. Everything feels right. Reasoning is inconsequential. (JZ)

# BOOGEYMAN II (1983)

**Bruce Starr aka Ulli Lommel**

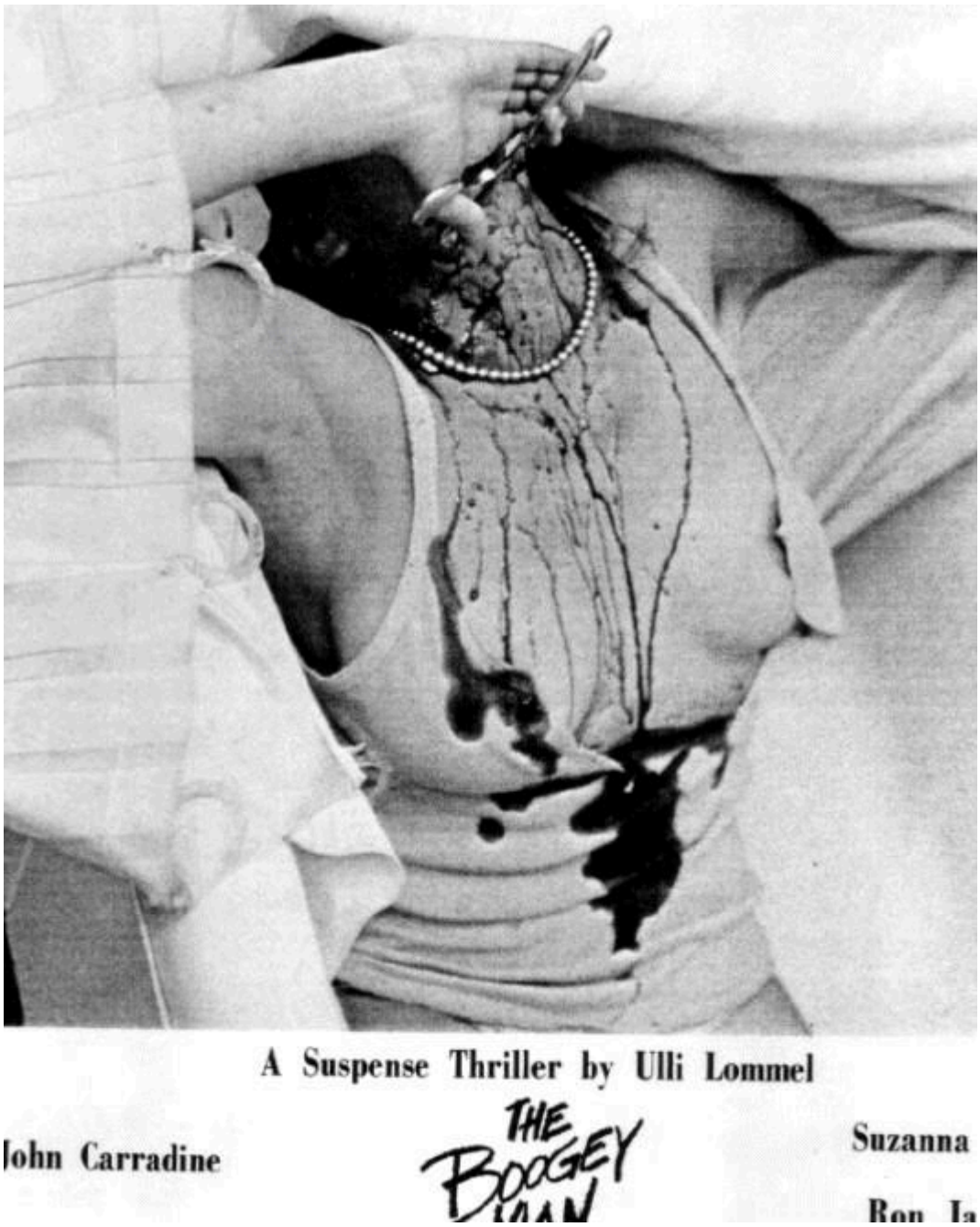
This movie is a “fuck you” to people in the film industry who care about nothing but money. Granted, that is most folks in the industry. Moviemaking is a business. A business that demands sequels to hits. Generally, a sequel is the same movie that made money the first time with a few extra tweaks here and there. *Friday The 13th Part 2* is a perfect example. It returns to a camp. It is filled with attractive young people who take their clothes off. It’s filled with violent killings. It has a big chase in the end. With *Boogeyman II,* Ulli Lommel took the “more of the same” sequel maxim literally. His film replays many scenes from the first one and lazily presents a slew of new killings. All the while it rails on about how sleazy Hollywood is and how badly it treats creative people.

The film runs about 80 minutes. About one-fourth consists of highlights from *The Boogeyman.* The rest of it consists of two portions: 1. Setting-up the replayed scenes from the first film. 2. A party sequence that kills off a crowd in the laziest (and sometimes funniest) ways possible. The film is doing the bare minimum it has to in order to be an actual film in its own right.

Lacey, the lead from the first film, goes to Hollywood. She stays with a director, played by Ulli Lommel. The director is slowly being forced to turn his latest art-house picture into a piece of tawdry exploitation. Lacey is hounded by Hollywood people. They want her to make her story, which are the events of the first film, into a movie. Lacey tells people her story, which involves many scenes from *The Boogeyman.*

Lommel is giving the viewers exactly what they say they want: a replay of the violence and scares from the first film. He cuts out the middleman and focuses on replaying the exact scenes from the first movie. It’s a fascinating film that is easy to respect but tough to watch. I can feel the contempt when I watch it. Not just for the producers and Hollywood but for me. A viewer who tunes in to see more senseless killing and pointless scares is laughed at by being forced to watch a frustrating movie that repeats scares from another

movie. *Boogeyman II* is contractual obligation made into abrasive art.




Here, the bulk of the killings happen to a series of Hollywood jerks at a party. They are filmed at low angles. Ulli distorts the images and uses fly-style POV to duplicate their images in the most grotesque ways he can. They are all rotten people and they all die in ways that

are hysterical. Someone is choked with an electric toothbrush. A garden hose drops on somebody and strangles them. A woman's mouth is pushed onto a tailpipe. They never feel like anything more than Ulli saying, "Yeah, whatever. These half-assed killings will do just fine." I can still hear him laughing. (DB)

# THE BRAIN (1988)

**Edward Hunt**

There's a young man who has "more sass than class." There's a strange scientific institution where he's sent in order to temper the sass. Within this institution, there's a crazy doctor/TV personality who is doing horrible things with his patients. He controls a giant man-eating brain that occasionally drifts through the halls. And the monster eats people in deliciously gory fashion.

It's a sad reality in the realm of almost anything creative that if something is just like a thousand other things, we tend to give it more breathing room. For example, a slasher is a slasher. We expect the same sort of elements to appear in each one of these films. Some of the elements are an opening sequence that sets up the remainder of the film, protracted stalking scenes and a Final Girl. When a slasher has these elements and does them well, the viewer says, "That is a good slasher film." Even if it may not be a very good film on its own. *Friday The 13th* is a "classic" slasher film but it has dull stretches and boring characters. We give it more leeway because of the genre it is a part of. When a film tries to go into its own space, more or less, it's on its own. We want imagination and we want it to be interesting and we want something/anything to actually come out of it.

*The Brain* is in its own space. The giant brain with teeth made me think this would be a wild monster movie. It's actually a clinical film about a scientist trying to master mind control mixed with a 1980s variation on a giant insect-type movie from the 50s. It's an intriguing mix but one that never completely comes to life. The lead actor is fine but kind of bland. The mad scientist has his moments but didn't

do much for me. In the end, I was just waiting for the giant brain attack, which is a lot of fun.

This film feels like a two hour pilot for a TV show from the mid-1980s that I probably wouldn't have watched. Maybe the series would have featured the brain and the scientist going from town to town trying to take over everyone's minds? Maybe the lead character hunts the scientist and brain across the country? I don't know. For some reason, I thought of *Misfits Of Science* as I watched this. And, if my mind is not leading me astray, I wasn't much of a fan of that. I preferred *Manimal* but I really liked *Enos.*

I hesitate to put the film down for trying something a bit different during this time period. But the concept behind the film never really grabbed my attention. And after a time, I just kept thinking "Surely we must be close to the final giant brain attack?" That part, as I said, is sufficiently loopy. But the rest of the film stays in an oh-too-sane place. You shouldn't miss that crazy brain, though. (DB)

# THE BRAINSUCKER (1988)

**Herb Robins**

Woolworth's interiors. A hunchback in a courtroom. Someone moaning "braaaaaiiiin suuuuckaaah" through a flanger pedal. Five minutes down and I'm already exhausted.

Typically, the gist of any trash-horror film can be summed up with one sentence. "Bigfoot rips off a guy's cock, rapes somebody, then kills some people in a cabin" or "An abortion doctor visits his patients and kills them in fake slow motion." *The Brainsucker* is an exception. This is the second and final film from writer-director Herb Robins, following 1977's *The Worm Eaters.* Robins had ties to Ray Dennis Steckler in the 1960s, acting as a jack-of-all-trades on a handful of Steckler's defining films. But unlike Titus Moody, another fringe filmmaker who worked with Steckler, Robins never made a lasting impact on his own. After making my way through *The Brainsucker,* it's not difficult to understand why. This is a SOV collection of random

footage of people screaming at each other. It's presented as an experimental horror-comedy, but feels more like an opportunity for someone, maybe Herb Robins, to work out some Mommy issues.

A hobo named Max is arrested. He literally gets dragged across town by a policeman. Then, he literally gets dragged across town by a hunchback. A mad scientist named Professor Klotz ties Max to a table and vows to make him a "positive super human being!" But the hunchback moves a lever from "GOOD" to "EVIL" and Max becomes a schizophrenic killer. From there, Max moves into a hotel and becomes a psychiatrist. There are voices in his head. They tell him to use a Nerf gun to remove his patients' brains and eat them. The brains look like mashed potatoes. Two cops are on Max's trail. One of them exploits an Inspector Clouseau accent. The other is Herb Robins. Why is all of this happening? Well, Max is angry at his mother. He blames her for his problems, and she blames him for hers – namely, losing the only man she ever loved (Max's father). Max constantly curses his deadbeat father. Max falls in love. Max hangs his mother.

From a technical standpoint, I can get behind what Herb Robins was trying to do. *The Brainsucker* is full of kinetic energy. Ten jump cuts occur in as many seconds. Stream-of-consciousness visuals (a hallway full of spandex-clad women wearing wings, a disc jockey with an afro wig, middle-aged people partying) dominate the film. Sound effects and electronic noises pop up for no apparent reason, while off-camera direction is sometimes left in. Unfortunately, *Brainsucker* doesn't benefit from experimentation in the same way that *Twisted Issues* does. It's too cryptic and unfocused. All of the yelling and bad fake accents prevent us from understanding what's trying to be communicated. And what's trying to be communicated is a mystery. There's not really a plot. There's no gore or nudity. There's not even a common through line aside from Max's mother issues.

If you've got the resources and drive to create an independent SOV horror film, why make one that's a mess and impossible to sit

through? Perhaps there were amazing drugs involved. Perhaps Herb Robins had no idea what he was doing. Perhaps you will watch this entire movie and only find enjoyment through an opening credit that reads: “starring Gay Nathan.” (JZ)

# BURIAL GROUND (1981)
# aka THE NIGHTS OF TERROR

**Andrea Bianchi**

Strange manboy Michael, his mother, her breasts and relentless smooshy-faced zombies will haunt your dreams for ages. Asleep and awake. This is a movie with insane images that will get into the folds of your brain and hide there. There is no time here for character development. No time for anything but a bit of running, a touch of hiding and a constant flow of violence and gore. If what you want – if what you need – is a film that dives right in, with very little time spent on anything but carnage, rowdy gore and Weird, then *Burial Ground* might just be the perfect movie for you.

This film was a popular rental back in my high school years. One of those video boxes we always saw on the shelves. One that promised . . . what exactly? Absolute horror? Yeah, maybe. The end of everything? Possibly. All people on the earth eaten by zombies and/or becoming zombies until all life fades away? Sure. Regardless of what you believed it might be, your thoughts could not dull the strangeness of this film.

And the strangeness is thick. It’s like the movie was made with zombie okra. The dubbing is weird. So weird that it feels like a virus has spread through the voices of the actors and is making every one of their words twist to insanity as it passes from mouth to microphone to ear. Whiffs of incest spread an extra layer on the madness, like a spoiled condiment. The fact that all the characters exist only to be killed, and maybe show some flesh, only increases the speed of the downward spiral. The Etruscans will rise and devour

all! Why? Who knows? You tell me. Does it matter? It’s happening and that’s all there is to it.

There are about twenty different ways I could have gone with this review. I could have told you about how over-the-top the film is. I could have placed it in “historical zombie context.” I could have focused on the setting and the atmosphere. I could have focused on Michael. I could have insisted that you will definitely like this film. I could have coerced you into liking it by listing every cool thing in it. But, instead, I’m going to go a slightly different way and just boggle at the oddness of it. This film is a pungent brown Bianchi stew filled with perfunctory, sloppy storytelling mixed in with meaty atmospherics, seasoned with spooky synths, and chunky with overflowing gore, alongside half-a-dozen moments that you will not forget. I enjoy this film to bits, literally. (DB)

# CAMPFIRE TALES (1991)

**William Cooke & Paul Talbot**

Drugs. Pirates. Satan Claws. And a badass fat kid with Air Jordans.

YES.

In the song “Rock On”, David Essex asked, “Where do we go from here?” I, too, ask that now. Where can we go when the limits of trash anthologies are pushed to the edge? *Campfire Tales,* a ragged

paste-up which somehow meshes Andy Milligan's anti-artsy compositions with *The Hackers's* hillbilly colloquialisms, holds the answer.

Three junior high kids (the fat, the mulleted, the Jane's Addiction devotee) sit in front of a campfire as Ralph (Gunnar "Leather-face" Hansen) shares stories. Ralph is the "harmless bum" who "lost his hand in 'Nam" and "might be a crazy old man." This all happens to the accompaniment of z-list metal, gore that looks exactly like strawberry preserves, people eating, and a constant, undefined squeaking noise. In "The Hook," it's Halloween. Two people make out in a car. They go home. The Hook is there. Then he slips on a pie tin. Next, "Overtoke" explains that if you smoke the stank weed, you will turn into a zombie and body parts will fall off. "The Fright Before Xmas" is my favorite. Steve kills his mother on Christmas because she won't give him the money to open a health spa. Satan Claws soon arrives to dole out the comeuppance. Satan Claws is a hulking monstrosity that deserves his own movie. Finally, "Skull & Crossbones" concerns a pirate who walks around on a beach while spewing racial slurs. Eventually, pirate zombies appear.

Brief, gory, and unapologetic in its stupidity, *Campfire Tales* is a reward for each and every minute spent in the company of dismal, anti-entertaining anthologies like *Terrifying Tales* and *Tales Of The Unknown.* And who knows? You might even find yourself admiring the occasional creep and the basement-level ambition.

I did. (JZ)

# CANNIBAL CAMPOUT (1988)

**Jon McBride**

Normal film: "I would like to have sex with you."

*Cannibal Campout:* "You can suck my cock and I'll lick your pussy."

Normal film: Pregnant women are treated with utmost respect.
*Cannibal Campout:* Someone eats a fetus.

Normal film: Photography is in focus and appropriately composed.
*Cannibal Campout:* A fly lands on the lens.

*Cannibal Campout* is not a normal film. That's why you should watch it.

Jon McBride has carved a career out of SOV filmmaking, most famously with *Feeders* and his later association with Mark and Jon Polonia of *Splatter Farm. Cannibal Campout* is McBride's debut. It's an attempt at creating a simplistic, full-length gore film for nothing but shits and giggles. Armed with an off-the-shelf camcorder, he did just that.

A woman jogs to the shittiest synth-pop of all time – even worse than the non-hits in *Demon Queen.* Her head meets an axe at the hand of a man wearing a jet-fighter helmet. Then, some overzealous college kids decide to take a camping trip for the weekend. Sure enough, three backwoods brothers (straight man, crazy guy, and a "retard") abduct the crew. The brothers talk about cocks and pussies. They overact, and then underact. Lots of time is spent depicting endless walks in the woods. There's a flashback rape and lots of full-throttle disembowelment. A victim threatens, "You don't know how lucky you are that I'm tied up!," three times in 45 seconds. That made me laugh.

*Cannibal Campout* is a mixed bag. It's a derivative triple split between laughs, boredom and violence. The tone shifts drastically, never choosing between comedy ("You axed for it!") or grittiness (most of the gore looks like borscht). On top of that, the smut talk and underwhelming delivery contrast with the competent photography and ominous wooded locations. It's as if McBride took *Just Before Damn,* added several scoops of nastiness, tossed in a single-riff piano score that refuses to die, and hit "Liquefy" on the blender. Then, he poured the results all over a Maxell videotape. Still, I'd watch it again. (JZ)

# CANNIBAL HOOKERS (1987)

## Donald Farmer

If *Attack Of The Beast Creatures* was made by an enthusiastic Monster Kid who doesn't quite make a great film, *Cannibal Hookers* was made by a Monster Kid who may have gone crazy. It's all very self-referential and jokey. It features a long scene in the Los Angeles store Hollywood Book & Poster. It's got a big brute named Lobo. It borrows most of its gore from another movie playing on a TV. And it's about a group of prostitutes who eat their johns. Where did we go wrong, mother?

*Scream Dream* is the best Donald Farmer film because it gets a perfect mix of things going. The rock, the ladies, the general confusion and all the other stuff that we enjoy so much. *Cannibal Hookers* is a little more amorphous. It's a gore film. It's a T&A film. It's self-referential. But is it any good? No. Does the quality of a video titled *Cannibal Hookers* actually matter? In the end, don't I watch a film called *Cannibal Hookers* mainly to tell other folks that I watched a film called *Cannibal Hookers?*

"We just saw the [Insert award-winning film title here]."

"Oh yeah. What did you think of it?"

"We loved it. Some fine acting."

"Great, great. I just saw a film called *Cannibal Hookers."* "What? What the . . . ? Is that a new one?"

"It's from the end of the 80s."

"How was it?"

"Awful."

You can also talk to other people who have seen this movie but what's the point in that? They already know it's awful. You can't one-

up them.

This one tops anything with Helen Mirren or Meryl Streep in it as a conversation starter. But first we have to watch it and that hurts a little. I'd love it if the plot wasn't so chunky. Everything lasts two minutes longer than it should and after a time it's over and the feeling I had was "So what?" If you pass by it, give it a try. But don't run for it. You'll fall and hurt yourself. (DB)

# CANNIBAL TERROR (1981)

**Allan W. Steeve**

Allan W. Steeve is the sort of name I'd think up to make my wife laugh. It's not the name of a man who directs cannibal movies. *Cannibal Terror* has a lot of incidents occurring before the main characters end up in the cannibal forest. Maybe Allan W. Steeve didn't believe he was making a full-on cannibal film? He might have thought he was making a high-tension story of a kidnapping that takes a cannibal turn in the final act. Only Mr. Steeve knows for sure.

Two guys and a lady friend kidnap the daughter of an important man. One of the men describes the lady as having "flippity-flop-pity boobies." The trio is told by a contact to head over the border. Once there, they will find a safe house in a forest. So, that's what they do. Eventually, the group is chased into the woods and end up with cannibals. I would have had them just crash in the woods, personally. Mixed in there is a great moment with some border guards. One of them says, "Nice thighs" to a young lady passing by. His pal says, "You can say that again." Very quickly, we hear the first guard mumble, "Nice thighs."

It isn't until the last half hour that the kidnappers and the child's pursuing parents head into the woods. They walk around a lot before meeting the cannibals. Some of them eventually get eaten by the cannibals. One of the cannibals has a mustache and big mutton chop sideburns. Another looks like he's wearing sneakers. This portion of the film lathers on the gore, which had been lightly

sprinkled throughout earlier. I wish Steeve had cut down on some of the scenes of people wandering around. That wore me out.

*Cannibal Terror* was produced by Eurocine. Throughout the viewing, I kept thinking of other Eurocine films, like *The Invisible Dead.* I thought about the crazy quotient of their films. There is always something weird going on, like invisible ape men raping women or Nazi zombies attacking nude volleyball players. I also think their films can be dull. Between the weird moments, things tend to drag. Maybe I should have reviewed *Cannibal Terror* without actually watching it? Just used the images on the video box as reference. Let my mind take over. Or maybe I should have watched it until I stopped liking it. I could have reviewed what I'd seen.

I started *Cannibal Terror* anticipating goodness, filled with hope. By the end, I was sighing and thinking that the film had lost its way. A Eurocine film needs a crazier plot than this one to keep it going. It starts off with little girls dubbed by older women. A trio of kidnappers who seemed to have grabbed their victim on a whim because they had nothing else to do. Glimpses of patently ludicrous cannibals. Then people just wander around a lot. Sometimes there's nudity. Sometimes there's gore. The concept and the images associated with the film outweighed the actual joys of the film. (DB)

Ein Inferno aus Wollust und Grausamkeit
Al Cliver · Sabrina Siani · Anne Marie Rosier
Regie: Jess Franco
MONDO CANNIBALE
3.Teil · Die blonde Göttin
Eine Sirus Filmproduktion im Verleih der SCOTIA

# CANNIBALS (1980)
# aka MONDO CANNIBALE
# aka WHITE CANNIBAL QUEEN

**Jesus Franco**

I don't know a lot about cannibal culture. But according to *Cannibals,* beer guts and flip-flops play a large role in it.

There's an old saying about the psychology of performance. Always look better than your audience, no matter what. The Beatles with their matching Chesterfields on *Ed Sullivan?* Steve Martin in a pressed white suit during his stand-up days? Jess Franco with his studiously composed vagina shots? Yes, yes, and yes. Without the tight compositions, dizzy visuals, and strategically placed reverb, *Cannibals* is just another cheap *Cannibal Ferox* rip-off with savages in flip-flops. However, with that Franco panache on board, it's just another cheap *Cannibal Ferox* rip-off with savages in flip-flops. But it is dressed for success. As I stare down at my tattered, food-stained robe, comprehension grows.

Professor Taylor – he of The Beach Boys circa "15 Big Ones" beards – loses his wife, daughter, and left arm to a band of clown-faced cannibals. Amnesia. Years pass. Love. No more amnesia. After convincing a group of socialites that his now-adult, now-sexy daughter may still be alive, Dennis Wilson – sorry – Prof. Taylor organizes a "cannibal hunt." Get the rifles! To the jungle! Showdown!

The padded-out *Cannibals* isn't on par with *Bloody Moon* or *Dracula, Prisoner Of Frankenstein,* or any of your personal Jess Franco greatest hits. Yet there's no fault in that. Variety? Yes. Action? Yes. Explanation? No. Whatever. The extended gore scenes are disorientating; they're surreal, hi-fi versions of Nathan Schiff's manic carnage. Dubbing is inappropriate. Nudity spreads out evenly. While these things keep the eyes at attention, the pull is the style, not the substance. Lighting, compositions, zooms *Cannibals* looks sharp, but asks nothing of your consciousness. When sitting down with a

lesser-known Jess Franco film, that's a big part of what I look forward to. That, and jungle savages with wedding rings. (JZ)

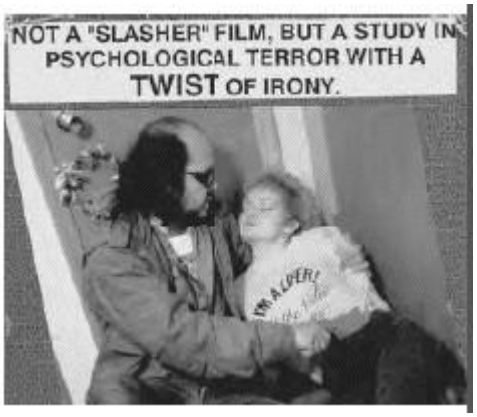
# CAPTIVES (1987)
# aka MAMA'S HOME

**Gary Cohen**

One dead dog, one knifed babysitter, and one almost-smothered baby. Welcome back to New Jersey.

Hot on the profit trail of *Video Violence,* Gary Cohen began production on *Captives,* his second SOV feature. Although shot in 1987, the film didn't hit the streets until after *Video Violence 2* was completed. And even then, *Captives* was re-edited and unceremoniously released by Majestic Video under the title *Mama's Home.* For years, this film was one of the most obscure SOV features of all time. Cohen held the only true master copy and disowned the butchered *Mama's Home* version. After seeing *Captives* complete and intact, as Cohen intended, we discover that it's also one of the most accomplished.

A woman and her family (baby, mother-in-law) find their home under attack by a trio of siblings: butch girl, "crazy" guy, and, of course, a retarded fat guy. The home is outfitted with Max Headroom posters and a gigantic wood-paneled entertainment center that blasts fifth-rate Journey rip-offs. The house-jackers are out for revenge against the woman's husband (played by Cohen himself), who literally snorts cocaine off of a hooker during his lunch break. But why the revenge? As it turns out, the husband had a baby with the female killer. Subsequently, he set a house on fire, bastard kid included. The lady killer, who was blamed for the crime, says, "I've been waiting too friggin' long to screw this up now!" People die.




Despite the obvious drawbacks inherent in SOV productions, *Captives* is sensibly plotted and unsettling in its gritty, real-time presentation. You'll recognize most of the cast from *Video Violence,* and they're a bit more convincing here. This was Cohen's attempt at something legitimate. He traded in gore and comedy for sober ruminations on suburban living. By its SOV nature, *Captives* is a far cry from home invasion big shots like *Fight For Your Life* and *House On The Edge Of The Park.* But within his constraints, Cohen succeeded in elevating the potential of SOV across the board. In its original form, *Captives* remains one of the most distinctive SOV trash-horror films from the movement's twilight years. (JZ)

# CARNAGE (1984)

**Andy Milligan**

Before the opening credits of *Carnage,* a groom shoots his bride in the face with a pistol. Then, he shoots himself. Andy Milligan never goes halfway.

My friend was unfamiliar with Andy Milligan's films. He asked me for an overview. I said, "Andy was this angry gay guy from Staten Island who hated his mother and the world. He filmed gory period pieces in his backyard in order to work out his problems." My friend said, "Holy shit, that sounds amazing!" I said, "It is. But I can't recommend his movies."

The appeal of a film that was written, directed, and photographed by Andy Milligan does not come from what appears onscreen. While it's true that Milligan's technical fingerprints (crude compositions, horrendous sound recordings, gaudy D.I.Y costumes) create a recognizable style, that's not what sets him apart from guys like Ted V. Mikels or Al Adamson. The real fascination comes from the man behind the camera.

For me, watching a Milligan film is similar to watching a Max Linder film. Linder was a revered silent French comedian from the early 1900s who entered, and fulfilled, a suicide pact with his wife. When I watch Linder's movies, that's all I think about. His serviceable comedies become much more intriguing when placed in the context of such a troubled life. The same goes for Andy Milligan. According to Jimmy McDonough's *The Ghastly One: The Sex-Gore Netherworld of Filmmaker Andy Milligan,* Milligan was a self-destructive, sadistic, sexually twisted, and egotistical man. As a child, his mother chased him with a knife and molested him. As a young man, Milligan beat his sister. As an adult, Andy bragged about his possible involvement with an S&M murder in England. Milligan's films served as collateral against a tragic life that could end at any moment. From *The Ghastly Ones* to *The Weirdo,* his filmography is filled with perverse murders, incest, and sexual humiliation. For three decades, his demons were documented through nearly forty dime store exploitation movies. By 1984, Milligan was way past his prime in terms of ideas and energy. This didn't stop him from writing and directing an *Amityville Horror* rip-off that was really just an excuse to make fun of married people.

Jonathan and new wife Carol move into the house where the prologue's murder-suicide took place. Jonathan looks and sounds like a skid row William Powell, but Carol is no Myrna Loy. He pretends to be a chair with a sheet over it! She prepares tea! When the newlyweds retire for the evening, it sounds like there are painters' tarps on their bed rather than sheets. The camera pans slowly around the entire house while candelabras move across a table, a phonograph begins playing, and a phone hangs up by itself. Gasp! The next day, a knife falls on Carol's finger. Screams are heard. Plates are broken. A subplot develops between Carol's sister and her mother. A lot of time is devoted to the two of them arguing ("Face it . . . after the first three years, marriage gets worse and worse!") It's soon revealed that the house is haunted by the couple in the prologue. Throats are slit, intestines are strewn, and a floating axe leads to decapitation. Also, someone gets cancer.

*Carnage* is not a film that everyone needs to see. It's padded with establishing shots of Milligan's Staten Island home and conversations between inconsequential people. There are long sequences of Carol sitting in a chair and drinking wine. There's a housewarming party with a very long toast. The camera is stuck on a tripod and left for dead. But I can't dismiss the film. The lack of vitality may be a problem, but Milligan's cynicism is always present. And always hilarious. If *Carnage* was cut down to 60 minutes, like Milligan's earlier *Blood,* I'd be beside myself with joy. As is, this film is for a very select group of people. People who can appreciate a cheap-ass horror film with dialogue penned by a nihilist who would rather be punching a relative than making a movie. (JZ)

# THE CARRIER (1988)

**Nathan J. White**

Adults wearing Hefty bags argue over the proprietorship of cats and apocalyptic chaos ensues. This garners my utmost respect.

With George Romero-lite ambition in tow, *The Carrier* presents a series of unconnected plot tangents before snowballing into victory. Bigfoot is one of the tangents. I have no idea what I just watched, but it made me smile.

Did Jake burn his parents to a crisp? Maybe. That's nothing to concern ourselves with, but it did prompt a man to yell, "WE DIDN'T START THE FIRE!" The big picture looks like this: A plague has run amok in a small town. Jake, the anti-anti-hero, appears to be The Carrier of said disease. He touches something and it melts. That is, unless his hand lands on an inanimate object. In that case, the object itself becomes a conduit of death. The townsfolk test his powers. On chicks and kittens. I'd like to believe that the combined forces of the Bible, a good doctor, and hundreds of people clad in Saran Wrap, bubblewrap, and CinchSaks could prevent a bloodbath over the kidnapping of a cat. But it cannot be so. Also, Jake falls in love.

If *The Carrier* had a larger budget, schooled actors, and non-psychotic editing, it would be unwatchable. Thankfully, that's not the case. This is a blast of strangeness that can only be made by people who have no money and no understanding of what it is that they're doing. We've got the surreal high school play-acting, a plot that revolves around kittens, and an admirable-yet-trite attempt at social commentary. Though light on actual bloodshed, *The Carrier*'s penchant for jittery tangents and unexpected occurrences knocks down 99 minutes as if they were 70. This is a rare accomplishment, one you appreciate more after watching the endless *The Nesting.* Speaking of rare accomplishments, there are also dueling cameos by Camus's *The Plague* and Dr. Seuss's *One Fish, Two Fish, Red Fish, Blue Fish.* (JZ)

# CEMETERY HIGH (1989)
# aka HACK 'EM HIGH

**Gorman Bechard**

The Scumbusters are a group of high school gals that have gotten very sick of being hit on by pervs and jerks. So they begin to kill all of them, using a lot of guns. And the gals' crusade becomes a big success. Women all over start killing men who hit on them, even in places like bars. This is a fun, satirical idea that never quite develops in the right direction.

It's a satire. It's a parody. It has some great bits and some funny moments but it never goes past the level of OK. And that's too bad because it is a good idea. The goofy *Airplane*-style moments kind of get in the way, too. Maybe if those were trimmed out and the film was re-shaped to about an hour it would be much finer.

The only men in the film who aren't jerks are the Comic Relief guy and the goofy coroner. Every other guy is worthy of murder. That's kind of funny but, in the end, it made me think of *Ms. 45.* In that one, the killing is balanced. Ms. 45 does start off killing those who

deserve it but then she goes over the top and kills anyone. In this film, there's never any question that every man is worthy of killing.

And I wonder if that is satire. A troop of gals killing men and the whole phenomenon being filmed in a semi-documentary style is a good idea. But what happens from there? Not a lot. The satire seems to revolve around the media treatment of these gals but that's only a small portion of it. Much of it covers the eventually endless scenes of the gals killing guys. Slaughtering rapists is one thing. Going into a man's house and seducing him . . . and then killing him when he succumbs . . . well, that seems to be a touch of entrapment to me. And, I thought the film might go the *Ms. 45* route but that never seems to be a thought in anyone's head.

*Cemetery High's* bursts of just-plain-goofy parody don't help. The film begins with an announcement about all the nudity and gore we are about to see. We are presented with The Hooter Horn, which will warn us of impending nudity. Then the Gore Gong, which will warn us of impending violence. These moments are fun but should be in a different film. This is, at its base, a satire but it's just as interested in exploitation and parody as anything else. I think Bechard's *Psychos in Love* was a romantic comedy and, as much as I enjoyed that, I think the Booms-Entering-Shot gags were too much. They're distracting. There's a kitchen sink quality to the comedy in *Cemetery High* and some of the sillier bits detract from the satirical message Bechard is trying to get across.

If there's no satire behind *Cemetery High,* that's fine. If it is just a goofy good time, that's fine. But the subject matter seems to be moving this film towards something that never quite realizes itself. And yet, when I first watched this about fifteen years ago, I remember not having this problem. I wonder why I have it now. I'd like to think that my tastes have matured. (DB)

# THE CHILDREN (1981)

**Max Kalmanowicz**

I met Karen on my train commute. Her fingernails were painted black.

One day, Kurt Vonnegut's *Slapstick* fell out of Karen's bag. I picked it up and gave it to her. We started talking. That talk was pleasant.

*The Children* features killer kids with black fingernails. Whenever the film flashed a close-up on those fingernails, I thought of Karen. That thought was also pleasant. And that thought was in good company.

*The Children* is comprised of nice things. Simple, uncluttered, and careless in all the right places, this is the type of humble horror film that is often idealized, but rarely actualized. *Terror On Tour, Dracula's Last Rites,* and *Ghostkeeper* are all similarly budgeted, early-80s obscurities that provide as many good-time thrills as *The Children,* but not as many good-time feelings. This film offers up what we want and expect (strange visuals, strange violence, strange everything) and a bit of what we don't. Everything clicks. The film flows. The world feels centered. Care for a hug?

DON’T DO IT.

After two lazy power plant employees spurn responsibility for an evening of brewskis, the fit hits the shan. Nuclear ooze. A cloud of yellow smoke. One half-empty school bus. And so, a handful of parasitic zombie kids with black fingernails begin to wipe out a small rural town named Ravensback. With hugs. Radioactive, skin-melting hugs. A topless woman sunbathes while her husband lifts weights. Middle-aged twins make sex jokes. Our sheriff is rather thin. Darkness falls. The Children force the survivors to seek shelter in a house. Good luck, Ravensback.

Like Frederick Friedel’s Axe, *The Children* breezes by while conjuring a gentle angst. The film does its best to communicate that adults are assholes, while building tension between quiet spaces and loud disturbances. But where Friedel’s film was built on despondency, *The Children* heads straight for fun. No effort is made to convey relatable emotions or experiences, and there’s no heaviness to sort through. Kids trying their best not to break into hysterics. Creative uses of wooded locations. Harry Manfredini’s score, which completely rips off the one he wrote for *Friday The 13th.* And, a method of dealing with the kids’ affliction that involves a samurai sword. Repetition crept in before the climax hit, but that didn’t matter. I was too busy thinking of pleasant conversations on trains. (JZ)

# CHRISTMAS EVIL (1980)

**Lewis Jackson**

The winter holidays and nostalgia go hand in hand. Even for psychopathic Santa Claus obsessives.

While most low-rent, holiday-inspired horror films evoke shock or laughs, very few stretch beyond the novelty of seeing Saint Nick (or his helpers) bludgeon someone with an axe. From *Elves* to *Don’t Open ‘Til Christmas,* the exploitation guarantee is expected and easily delivered. On the other hand, a handful of Christmas-themed

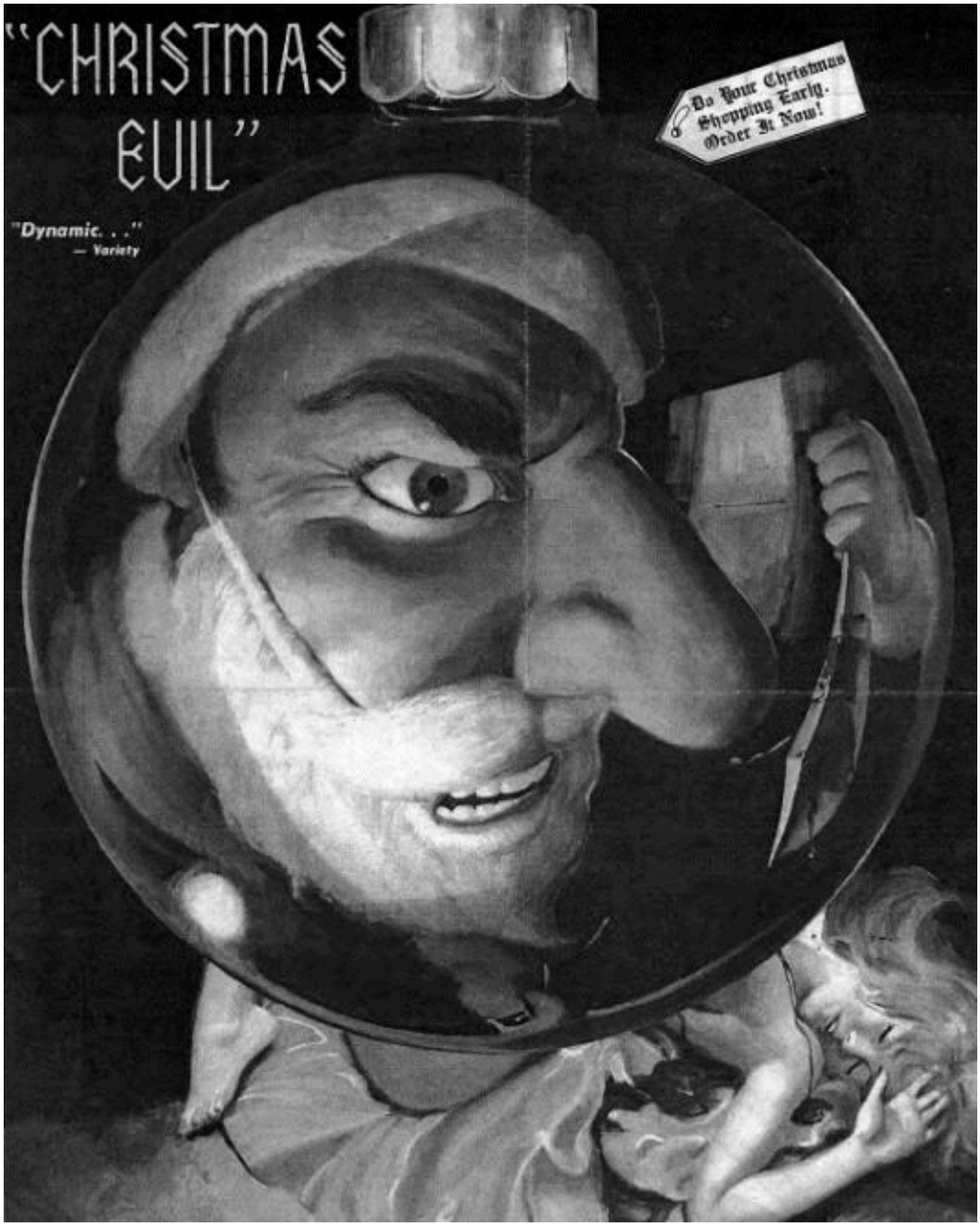
horrors step beyond the typical confines of the genre. They surpass expectations, creating their own unique space in the minds of those who “get it.” Once a year, they return, filling our living rooms with warm gifts, pine-coated memories, and plenty of the red stuff. Meet *Christmas Evil.*

It’s Christmas Eve, 1947. Strolling down to the living room to investigate a noise, Little Harry gets the scare of his life as he peers in on Santa (aka Dad) and Mom doing something that adults do.

Years later, Harry works a banal job at the tacky Jolly Dream Toy Factory. But that’s not all he does. Obsessed with Santa Claus, Harry sleeps in Kris Kringle’s duds, covers his apartment with holiday decorations, constantly hums Xmas carols, and spies on the neighborhood kids. He also keeps leather-bound books of which kids have been naughty and which kids have been nice, ensuring his position as a bonafide ultra-creep. As Christmastime rolls around, Harry becomes increasingly frustrated with the hypocritical company he works for and the mistreatment at the hands of co-workers. He then logically sews his own extravagant Santa suit, takes to the streets on Christmas Eve, and doles out “rewards” to the good people. And the not-so-good people.

*Christmas Evil* is not what you’d expect. Of course, horrific elements exist. But this isn’t the typical trash-slasher garbage. Instead, we’ve got an excellently acted snapshot of an unhinged man’s slow dive into the surreal. Enthralling from the get-go, *Christmas* offers up bushels of tight photography and emotionally draining interactions. Once Harry dons the suit, his schizo tendencies come full force, and people aren’t quite sure how to react. That leaves the viewer open

for surprises, including an out-of-nowhere gore sequence and an uncomfortable speech that Harry bellows to some kids while in Santa mode. Despite his destructive behavior, you can't help but feel sorry for the guy, which is a direct result of the well-executed intensity.




Then, there's the reality aspect. Who's to say that something like this couldn't happen? That's *Christmas Evil*'s strongest trait, as it never

rests on the expected laurels of an “invincible” killer. Harry’s existence is coated with a genuine sense of emptiness, from the dead-on depiction of a dead-end job to his claustrophobic freak-outs while driving. As the unexpected ending replayed in my head, I realized that *Christmas Evil* was something special. It joins *Black Christmas* and *Silent Night, Bloody Night* as a unique, accomplished, and frightening holiday-horror experience, offering much more than you’d expect of a novelty exploitation film from 1980. Nostalgia can be so sweet. (JZ)

# CRAZED (1982)
# aka BLOOD SHED

**Richard Cassidy**

Stay away from boarding houses. Don’t live in them, don’t visit them, and most importantly, don’t fraternize with their residents. You just never know.

From *Carnival Of Souls* to *Mongrel,* the low-budget horror film has always taken advantage of dilapidated rooming houses. Makes sense. The shadowy crevices, the transitory status of residents – the setting reels with possibilities. *Crazed* is a boarding house shocker that’s consumed with sadness, violence, and disturbing themes. It doesn’t stop attacking you until the end credits roll.

Karen suffers from diabetic seizures and a case of the dumps. Leaving boyfriend Rodney on good terms, she makes her way to Los Angeles, with plans of enrolling in a creative writing course. After visiting a couple of fleabag motels, Karen settles on a room at Mrs. Brewer’s boarding house. Mrs. Brewer has some metal attached to her legs, so stair climbing is out of the question. She hasn’t been upstairs in twenty years. Too bad, since that’s where Grahame, a star tenant (“He’s like a son to me”) and psychopath has staked his claim. Grahame has modified the top floor to fit his needs. Two-way mirrors. Secret passageways. Peepholes. Karen fuels Grahame’s voyeuristic tendencies with sex, drugs, and even a little rock ’n’ roll.

Naturally, Grahame is in love with Karen. Unnaturally, he's going to make sure that love is reciprocated.

*Crazed* is a few gore scenes short of a sicko triumph. But it's still pretty great. Get past the TV movie soundtrack, rubber knife, and annoying college professor. Once you do, there's no looking back. The film builds its tension from psycho-sexual emotional scars and the effects that they have on a garden variety lunatic. As Grahame's psychosis makes normal, day-to-day activities increasingly difficult for him (Going to church! Prostitutes!), the film's sickening plot points expand. The ramshackle Los Angeles locations and exceptional acting chops are both perfect complements for the subject matter. *Crazed* could have turned into a clumsy joke, like *Mongrel.* Instead, it's a downbeat boarding house thriller that builds slowly, rarely deviates, and dishes out a satisfying level of perversion. (JZ)

# CURSE OF THE BLUE LIGHTS (1988)

**John Henry Johnson**

*Curse Of The Blue Lights* is homemade! That's why it tastes so good! They made it for you – that's better than a store-bought gift, surely. There are some very special combinations brewing in this film. Think of it as a regional version of some sort of meat-loaf dish. The cook knows what's in there and the joy is that you might not always be able to figure it out. But you can still enjoy portions of it.

A series of underground ghouls scheme to bring an ancient monster back to life to help them rule the world. A bunch of local folks get involved in stopping them. Well, there you go. Some of the ingredients in this film work. The ghouls are grotesque looking and definitely evil. They also have a sense of macabre humor when they do their killing. The Blue Lights shining on the empty plains lend an air of mystery to the opening scenes of the film. Some things don't quite strike the palette right, like the long takes or the incredible proliferation of rather similar characters. But, I think a dish "Made With Love" is always worth trying. Be warned, though: *Curse Of The Blue Lights* has one thing going against it early on. The name of its

main monster is “The Muldoon Man”. That’s a good name for a construction worker but not really great for an undying, eternal evil force that a series of ghouls are trying to awaken. Luckily, the “Muldoon Man” and all of the ghouls are well designed monsters. They are straight out of EC Comics or the mind of a crazy child.

Still, the plot has enough to keep things interesting . . . almost. Since we’re not always 100% sure what’s going on, some surprise keeps us hooked. There are several stretches where the pace could have been picked up a bit. I’ve noticed, in my wanderings, that a lot of these regional films have the same sort of trouble. Films like *The Returning* or *Fiend* can have decent plots but the direction sometimes seems a bit off. Almost as if the guiding hand doesn’t quite seem to understand how much we need to know or how quickly we take in exposition and how they should present it to us. This slows the pace down to the point where some of the audience members may lose interest.

The ghouls command attention. The atmosphere grabs you. It’s just the characters (matched with the somewhat slack direction) that cause trouble. A few of the characters work but there are just too many of them. The plot sort of happens to them, which is the way for most films like this. Would it have killed anyone to have given at least one or two of the characters a bit of life beyond the Blue Lights? I never felt like they were anything more than actors assembled for shots. Now, that’s not completely a bad thing. An assemblage of goofballs can be mighty entertaining. It’s just that whenever they cut away to the ghouls, I kept thinking “The regular humans are okay. But I think there’s a more interesting movie going on in the creepy vault filled with ghouls.” At the end of the day, when someone goes out and puts together something for consumption by the public I believe some respect must be paid. There is no feeling of hucksterism here. No feeling of “This is good enough. The viewing public will watch it and like it.” I don’t love *Curse Of The Blue Lights.* I’m not sure how much I like it. But I like enough of it and I respect its intentions.

That’s all I need. (DB)

# THE DARK SIDE OF MIDNIGHT (1985) aka THE CREEPER

**Wes Olsen**

When I see the same guy listed as writer/producer/editor/director/star on a movie, I know I’m going to have a good time. Especially if I’ve never, ever heard of that person. I don’t know if I need to meet Wes Olsen. Because I feel like I know everything I need to know about him from his film, *The Dark Side Of Midnight.*

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In a small town where all the men sport magnificent mustaches, the Detroit Creeper is killing women. The police chief wants to hire a special investigator by the name of Brock Johnson. The mayor doesn’t want money spent on Brock. Will the money be allocated for Brock? Could it possibly be borrowed from the zoning commission who will probably just spend it on doughnuts? After all that, will Brock even show up? Can the Detroit Creeper be stopped?

This film gets very little respect but it makes me hilariously happy. It’s not a showy or crazy film. Wes keeps a tight rein on the hysterics. He has constructed a beautiful world. There’s Brock, the sheriff, the

sheriff's daughter, the mayor, the other cop whose name I never wrote down and The Creeper. All of these characters are clichés. In the hands of a superb writer-director, these cliches would be used to his advantage and this would be a solid thriller. And, I'd only watch it once and you wouldn't be reading a review of it in this book. Wes makes the arrival and presence of each of these characters as much fun as picking through a box of assorted chocolates. Perhaps this next taste will be the analytical caramel of Brock Johnson or the sweet truffle of the red-headed daughter or the musky nougat of the mayor's mustache.

I once watched this twice in one day because it creates such a wonderful world that I didn't want it gone when the closing credits had finished. This is a space where you can hang out and enjoy. The non-thriller scenes are the best. Scenes in over-furnished rooms between self-important men with dueling facial hair make me delirious with joy. More than any shootout, I like to watch Brock faff around with his limited detective skills and hit on the sheriff's daughter.

What is a sure sign of greatness in a film? In *The Dark Side Of Midnight,* Brock Johnson is set up as young, successful, handsome and very smart. Anticipation is high. We await the arrival of this God Among Men. And then, that character arrives and he is played by the director because, obviously, no one else could be trusted with a role like that. At that point, you're not just in good hands. You're in the giant, giving hands of Wes Olsen. (DB)

# DAWN OF THE MUMMY (1982)

**Frank Agrama**

In 1983, my family purchased a VCR. It was a top-loading JVC HR-7100U with large, primary-colored buttons. From there, we made many trips to The Video Shack in Glenwood, IL. "The Shack," as we called it, was a closet-sized storefront with approximately one hundred rental tapes. After stepping through its doors, I was given free reign by my dad. I could rent anything.

Ratings weren't always listed on tape boxes. And even if they were, many instances of gore and tits slipped through the PG cracks. My parents discovered this when they caught me, jaw agape, during Adrienne Barbeau's impromptu jungle bath scene in *Swamp Thing.* Free reign at The Video Shack would soon be over. But not before I could get my hands on *Dawn Of The Mummy.*

For years, I've carried around a memory of *Dawn.* It concerns an Egyptian tomb, a sexy priestess, and some chest-ripping gore. In other words, the film's first five minutes. Back in 1983, that's as far as I got. The movie scared the shit out of me so badly that I hit "EJECT" and felt horrible for two weeks.

Unfortunately, the *Dawn Of The Mummy* of today has little to offer me outside of that prologue. Some hawt-ass New Yorkers decide to shoot some photos in Egypt for a fashion magazine. At the same time, three bandits are "excavating" the burial site of a mummy. The two groups cross paths. The fashion photographer decides that the mummy's tomb would make a terrific backdrop for some photos. Whoops! The place is cursed and the mummy comes back to life, bringing an army of zombies with him. But before that happens, an hour of film passes by while people talk and drum machines wail. The final 30 minutes are full of butcher shop gore. Zzz-town.

Aside from a hilarious hatchet-to-the-dummy-head kill scene, *Dawn Of The Mummy* excels in uninspired monotony. There is a dreary gruesomeness to the whole thing, but if I want that, I'll watch *Anthropophagus.* As for the general sense of madness? I'll take *Nightmare City* any day. And I'll feel good about it. *Dawn* was so derivative and exhausting that the benefits of nostalgia did nothing to hold my interest. Eject. Again. (JZ)

# A DAY OF JUDGMENT (1981)

**Christopher Reynolds**

At first glance, the most compelling aspect of *A Day Of Judgment* is the fact that everyone appears to be painted in White Face. This is followed by the film's score, which sounds like it was cobbled together by a Viking with an ARP Synthesizer, Harry Nilsson, and someone who loves it when a banjo string is plucked once or twice.

These are the only joys I could glean from this bloated Christian scare film. That's kind of a shame. Because for all of its meandering, *Judgment* is an abstraction from the height of Slasher-Mania. Perhaps, with some critical editing or more focused direction, the actualization could have met the aspiration halfway. Instead, a winning concept (The Grim Reaper visits a small 1920s town to give sinners the what-for) gets snuffed by a 100 minute runtime, "thespians" arguing and pointing guns, and a camera that may have been cemented to the ground.

Jesus does not save.

Forgoing a plot, *Judgment* shares a series of vignettes that chronicle the dirty deeds of cantankerous townsfolk. There's the old lady who poisons a goat. A son kicking his parents out of their estate. A fat, sweaty banker who causes a man to commit suicide after his house forecloses. You get the idea. Once in awhile, the Grim Reaper shows up in a swirl of mist and colored lights. He's got a black hat and a scythe. And gelatin on his face. These appearances would be great, if not for the fact that they last for approximately 0.5 seconds each. The whole thing wraps up with a beheading and a march to hell (plastic skeletons, background paintings from the *He-Man* vaults), followed by a pre-end-credits prayer. There is also a Fat Sheriff. His appearance here, in the 1920s, may cause academics to reassess their theories on the bigger-than-life origins of this American folklore hero. But that is another study for another time.

Less seething than Ron Ormond's early 1970s Christ-gore epics, *A Day Of Judgment* is the Christian scare film that cares too much.

Less reliance on “characterization” and more faith in structural experimentation would have gone a long way. (JZ)

# DAY OF THE REAPER (1984)

**Tim Ritter**

First, I want you to know that I recently waded in the Pacific Ocean for the first time.

Second, I want you to know that *Day Of The Reaper* is about a cannibalistic, black-hooded nasty roaming around nondescript suburbs and killing people who wear bikinis and white short-shorts.

Third, I want you to know that you may despise *Day Of The Reaper* for the very reasons that I enjoy it. Unless you’re into wading.

This film’s potential is contingent on what you bring to it. Shot in Florida for $1,000 on silent Super 8 by teenager Tim Ritter *(Truth Or Dare?; Killing Spree), Reaper* is a psychotropic daymare as captured through the lens of a malfunctioning Kodak Instamatic. There’s a simplistic, yet incomprehensible through-line. Humans communicate, but never connect. Events unfold for unknown reasons. Most of the time, it’s just people sitting on couches or on beaches or in shabby motel rooms. And then they die. In a sense, *Reaper* is a gore-trash variant on Andy Warhol’s bewildering *Empire;* we don’t know why we’re watching this film, or why we’d even want to, but the cumulative dreamlike state that results is remarkable. Yet again, it all depends on you.

*Day Of The Reaper* was made by, and stars, teenagers. People who weren’t fully formed, whose minds couldn’t fathom anything other than what was happening right now, this very second. As with the work of Nathan Schiff, this aspect is important. If adults were making *Day Of The Reaper,* they’d think about it. They’d plan things out and do it “right.” But Ritter didn’t know any better. He just pointed the camera and let it run, smear, and bleed all over the place. That unrestrained enthusiasm took the form of a drowsy displaced tribute

to whatever horror films excited the filmmaker during the summer of ‘84.

I see a lot in this film. I see *Ogroff* with less perversion and less mystery. I see a sexless *Sinthia, The Devil’s Doll* that swaps easy-listening kitsch for anxious synth-stabs. I see non-traditional techniques that make zero sense in my mind, but perfect sense in my eyes. And unlike S.F. Brownrigg’s *Keep My Grave Open, Reaper’s* inadvertent sense of design isn’t drowned out by empty dramatics. Ritter’s age prevented that. He didn’t have the awareness to hassle the film with unnecessary complications. Now, someone else might see something totally different. *Reaper* could easily be interpreted as a dredging exercise in exhaustion.

*Day Of The Reaper* is 70 minutes of makeshift slasher-trash with a beautifully warped visual aesthetic. It’s the type of experience that can only be realized by people who don’t know what they’re doing. Or teenagers. Or Andy Warhol. And it’s the type of experience that I could wade through all night. (JZ)

# DEAD GIRLS (1990)

**Dennis Devine**

Sometimes you just want a slasher. A scare or two. Some creepy atmosphere. A group of dopey characters. A decent setting and a fun score. If you're going too far afield from those things, you're not really going to be a slasher. *Dead Girls* is a slasher but it goes too far

afield and almost enters another realm. A realm that, frankly, I'm not terribly interested in visiting.

The killer wears a creepy skull mask topped with a fedora. The location is a country house next to a lake. The victims are an all-girl rock group called the Dead Girls. Killings occur based on the lyrics of their songs. For example, the Dead Girls' manager is killed with a nail gun. Then, someone delivers a copy of the lyrics for a song called "Nail Gun Murders" to the band. We have an extremely cute leading lady who goes by the stage name of Bertha Beirut. Everything seems to be in place until you spot the running time. 105 minutes. Why so long? If the average slasher is 80-90 minutes, what does this film do that requires a lot more time?

Well, there are a lot of sanctimonious red herrings. Let me explain: The Dead Girls specialize in not-very-good songs about violent subjects, like nail gun murders. Bertha's sister tries to commit suicide because of this music. Because of that and the subject matter of the music, everyone gives Bertha a lot of grief. It's tiring. People talk about Jesus and how the lead gal doesn't care about her sister when she clearly does. At first, it seems like crazy people talking in order to plant the red herrings. But, it goes on and on and on. Every few minutes someone goes off on her. All I thought was, "We got it. We got it!" It goes from "Could one of these sanctimonious people be crazy and killing?" to "What are the filmmakers up to?" Surely, the Dead Girls should be called out for making mediocre music rather than their violent lyrics.

The people's attitudes and the general sort of inconsiderate behavior in this film may reflect reality but that's not why I watch these movies. And the imagination required to create the world where this band is a success may be too much for the average viewer. Their music is nonsense, even in a Hair Metal World. The basics behind this movie work beautifully but after a while you start looking around the room. The script needed something trimmed.

Over-ambitiousness in a slasher is not a crime. The film ends with several twists. They're quite good, although the final one is very mean-spirited. It was only when the movie ended that I realized it wasn't scary. After all the talking and the extended running time, I needed something and I was left disappointed. No scares in a slasher. That's a crime. (DB)

# DEADLINE (1983)

**Mario Azzopardi**

Have you seen *First Born* from 1984? Teri Garr is a cokehead mom, Corey Haim has dirt bike problems, and Peter Weller punches people into pinball machines. It's pretty great. *Deadline* is also about a feel-bad family in crisis, but with the added bonus of hobos pooping themselves and grandmas getting lit on fire. It's also pretty great.

*Deadline* hits you like a brick to the teeth. The film intercuts the lives of a dysfunctional family with random scenes of shocking brutality and blunt social commentary. Depending on your day, the cumulative experience can feel harsh, or completely hilarious. It's over-the-top trash in the basest sense. As soon as you hear a little kid call his dad a motherfucker, you'll know what I mean.

Steven Lessey is a cold man. And a rich one. Making a mint off of his horror novels and subsequent film adaptations, Steve finds himself with issues: writer's block, pressure from his agent, and public criticism. The stress hits its mark. After a series of awesome domestic disputes (like slapping his coked-up wife in front of the

children and screaming, “You fuckin’ bitch!”), Lessey’s life completely unravels. Tragedy strikes. Will all the money, hookers, and cocaine in Toronto save Steve and his family from his demons? Probably not.

Interspersed within the nonstop plot are random acts of intense violence from Steven’s films – a mechanic is torn apart, cannibal nuns feast on a priest at the altar, kids light their grandma on fire, a Nazi goth band’s music forces bums to shit themselves and explode. *Deadline* weaves a portrait of a grown man falling to pieces, while attempting to raise “issues” pertaining to violence in the media, the creative process, and rich white people. When the various strands meet up, the film feels like a cross between *The Shining* and *Faces Of Death.* And *First Born.* Minus Corey Haim kicking Peter Weller in the crotch. (JZ)

# DEADLY GAMES (1982)

**Scott Mansfield**

Sheriff Roger points a revolver at his wife and whispers, “BANG,” just to let her know who’s boss. We are in the presence of people who play deadly games.

DEADLY! GAMES!

The title alone is enough to make you shit your pants in stark, raving fear. Lucky for us, one time director-writer Scott Mansfield and his cast of underachievers derail it all with severely incorrect choices. Instead of tension, we get Dick Butkus in a towel. Want some bloodshed? Sorry, no time for that. Someone's too busy rolling a twelve-sided die during a Dracula role-playing game.

Linda strips in the moonlight of her bungalow apartment. She has exceptionally large boobs. A madman invades! He wears black gloves! And a ski mask! Linda is thrown out the window and this is shown in slow motion. Keegan is Linda's sister. She's back in town to Get To The Bottom Of Things. She also babbles endlessly, impersonates a vaudeville comic, and has facial expressions that make Terry's from *Three's Company* seem subtle. Soon you will pray for someone to put Keegan out of her misery. Instead, she falls for Roger, who also owns a movie theater with his friend Billy. Various townspeople revel in adultery and the presence of Dick Butkus. In the meantime, we're treated to a "hanging out" montage that includes people watching old movies, people playing an organ, and people throwing a football. The killer's identity is extremely obvious. But then he dies and a different guy attacks Keegan on a rope swing.

Despite some badass slasher visuals, *Deadly Games* does not offer terrifying situations or a pointed series of events. Instead, we get an incessant smoker's hack and a group of middle-aged men playing football, plus the most atrocious non-ending since Nick Millard's *The Terrorists.* BANG! (JZ)

# DEADLY INTRUDER (1985)

**John McCauley**

When you begin with an almost perfect variation of the *Halloween* theme during your credits, you've got me. A crazy man escapes from an institution. A lovely woman named Jessie lives in the country and gets bothered by a very suspicious drifter. She has some friends over for dinner. There's killing. There's kidnapping. The leading lady

takes a long bath but someone else's boobs appear in the close-ups. Danny Bonaduce is here. Stuart Whitman plays a cop. There is a farting dog. And the movie moves along decently. All the elements seem to be in place for a good slasher film.

And then, the music becomes a little too upbeat instead of creepy. I kept expecting the Pointer Sisters to start singing along. At that point, *Deadly Intruder* began to lose me and I wondered about the intentions of the filmmakers. They are subverting the whole slasher world here because the drifter breaks into Jessie's house and kidnaps her. But he's obviously not the killer so we wait for the slasher to return. The film spends a lot of time on the kidnapping scenes and, eventually, it seems to be about something other than slashering.

Hooray for *Deadly Intruder!* It puts a spin on a formula that (possibly) has been done to death. It's too bad that slashers are one of those genres that resist such fiddling around unless it is revolutionary. Imagine going to see a western. It starts with cattle rustlers and gunfights. Everything you want from a western. Some of the film is better than others of its ilk. Some of it is average. Then, halfway in, it becomes a courtroom drama. And this goes on until the last five minutes, when the gunfights begin again. One can applaud that western for breaking with tradition but, if you want a western and get Frontier Perry Mason, it had better be superior entertainment. *Deadly Intruder* is not superior entertainment. It's an average film that is trying something different in the genre of slasher films. But, when you sit down to watch a slasher, you want a slasher. If the story this film told was fascinating, then that wouldn't matter so much. In the end, I'll watch a fascinating film any day, regardless of what it is. The filmmakers certainly try. But it's simply not a very good film. (DB)

# DEADLY LOVE (1987)

**Michael O'Rourke**

What is deadly love?

Deadly love is carving a loved one's name in your palm. Deadly love is defending your girlfriend with "I'm gonna give you ten seconds to get out of here 'fore I start wailin' on your head with this shovel!" Deadly love is forcing yourself on someone sexually while wearing a *That's Incredible!* t-shirt. What is *Deadly Love?* I dare you to find out.

The theme song is called "Forever Together." It repeats itself exactly eleven times. Speaking of repetition, *Deadly Love* is an 84 minute film comprised of 50 minutes of recycled footage. It may have been shot-on-video somewhere outside of Hollywood, then transferred to film stock for home video release. The actors might not be real humans. If the facts sound questionable, I apologize. Triple overlapping soundtracks, puke-inducing zooms, and four mongoloids in a Jeep Cherokee tend to cloud my senses.

An undead killer in full Harley Davidson regalia will protect his beloved Annie at all costs, be it in 1965 (mullets, Reeboks, drum machine) or 1987 (mullets, Spuds McKenzie, beer). Twenty years after the tragic death of her true love, Buddy, Annie commits suicide in the bathtub. The guys in the Jeep should have minded their own business. When Annie's niece inherits the family estate, they're in for a big dose of deadly love. Is Buddy really back from the grave? Should the cameraman zoom again? Will the *That's Incredible!* fat guy score with a girl? Perhaps "The Encyclopedia Of Ancient And Forbidden Knowledge By Zoltar" could shed some light. Unfortunately, I have no idea what it's doing in this movie, either.

Director Michael O'Rourke made one film after *Deadly Love (Moon Stalker)* before moving on to screenplay work *(Hellgate),* but he didn't need to. This film is enough to ensure the legacy of eight men. A gore-soaked double ending, endless footage reiterations, actors apparently in the throes of enemas – this is true SOV beauty. True beauty leads to love. May it always be deadly. (JZ)

# DEATH NURSE (1987)

**Nick Millard**

A surgeon wears a dish rag over his face. Rubber bands hold it in place. He wipes blood on a patient's hairy chest. Then, the surgeon digs a hole outside, enters a house, fixes himself a bowl of ice cream, and walks upstairs. His name is Gordon. Gordon has a sister named Crazy Fat Edith. They chase a cat around a table.

Was *Death Nurse* meant to be watched by people?

Nick Millard aka Nick Philips aka My Favorite Dissident spent forty years quietly churning out disconnected trash that few people understand, let alone attempt to understand. In a sense, that's what makes his work so appealing. That, and the fact that none of his films exceed 70 minutes. Like Daniel Johnston's songs and Kenneth Patchen's fictions, Millard's methods (shockingly terrible compositions, non-stop jump cuts, complicated plotlines about nothing in particular) reject convention and the world-at-large. This establishes a cinematic experience that only he, and he alone, can offer. After dozens of 1960s and 70s soft-and-hardcore curiosities (The *Pleasures Of A Woman, Oddo)* and two trash-horror benchmarks *(Criminally Insane, Satan's Black Wedding),* Millard found himself behind a camcorder in the 1980s. Enter *Death Nurse.*

Nurse Edith Mortley (Priscilla Alden aka Crazy Fat Ethel from *Criminally Insane)* and Gordon live in a house that doubles as the Shady Palms Clinic. I'm not exactly sure what they do there. Sometimes, Edith sits on, stabs, or strangles patients to collect insurance money from the state. Gordon washes a corpse with a rubber hose. An old woman says "YEEELLLO?" when answering the phone. Gordon pretends to cough while spying on people in a foyer. There's a lot of runny blood. A grandma runs up the stairs in a silk nightgown and her boobs almost flop out. Edith and Gordon sit on a couch and stare at the floor. The End.

*Criminally Insane* is Nick Millard's defining film. That's where everything came together. The crude techniques. The subtle humor. A quiet disdain pointed in the direction of something that's not entirely clear to us. It's the only Millard film that I share with "norms," or people who aren't typically into movies with two minute stretches

of a woman eating scrambled eggs. *Criminally Insane* is the Millard movie that most resembles something that could actually take place in reality. Millard must have felt the same way, as he literally recycled footage from *Criminally* for not only *Death Nurse,* but also *Criminally Insane II* and *Death Nurse 2.* All SOV. All from 1988. All utilizing the same house, cast, opening credits, music, camcorder, scenes, and general sense of madness. So what's the difference between these films? *Criminally Insane II* features thirty-five minutes of footage from *Criminally Insane. Death Nurse* cops a mere fifteen. Interpret that as you will.

*Death Nurse* may or may not have been meant for public consumption. There's nothing about it that would encourage anyone to watch. Everything is ugly and claustrophobic. The camera is always too close. The film is mostly defined by people talking on the phone or grunting off camera while VCR rainbow dubbing lines cascade across the screen. The intense technical strangeness ensures that boredom never fully surfaces, even if it's always on the horizon. What this means is that I've seen *Death Nurse* three times. And I'll see it ten more. (JZ)

# DEATH NURSE 2 (1988)

**Nick Millard**

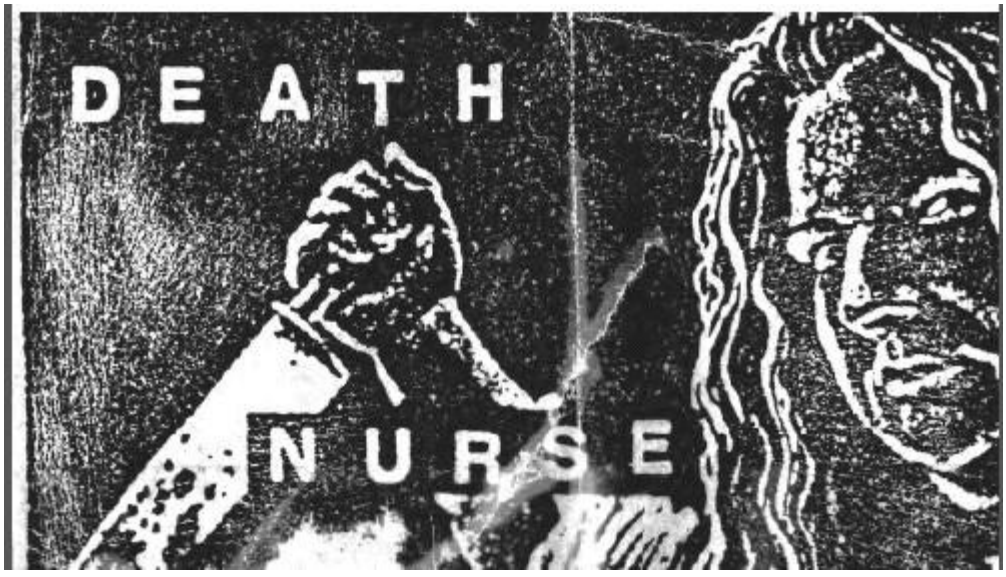
The mighty cycle of Edith Mortley draws to its epic conclusion! We see the same flashbacks from *Death Nurse.* We see the same actors in different roles. We see the same furniture and the same adding machine. If Millard had taken all of the Mortley footage and cut out the flashbacks, maybe took out some scenes of eating and accounting, then he would have had a truly crazy 90-minute extravaganza simply called *Death Nurse* with no need for this sequel. But, it doesn't work like that.

Did he split the footage up and keep the films at an hour apiece because that's the normal length of a Millard film? Was he just trying to stretch a buck? The *Death Nurse* movies were pretty scarce back in the day. "I didn't know there was a first movie and now I'm

watching part two!” Hucksterism at its finest? Was this meant to be the second part of an endless serial-style story stretching to *Death Nurse 43?* Who knows. I’m just glad we got them.

Edith Mortley kills the police officer that peeped into the garage at the end of the first movie. A social worker keeps getting the Shady Palms Clinic new patients. The twin sister of the old woman, who got chased up the stairs in her nightgown and stabbed in the first one, shows up. The whole thing goes along the same exact way as *Death Nurse.* Ragged editing and lots of room tone overwhelm scenes. Some of it looks like the video shorts I made when I was 11, especially *Invasion Of The Killer Bagels* in Mark Kahwati’s backyard. Other parts almost resemble cinema vérité. But cinema vérité with Big Fat Crazy Ethel running around in it.

Is this good stuff? Is it, possibly, the pinnacle of SOV or the nadir of “I don’t care about you and I’m just after your money” cinema? Maybe both. My thought is that it is truly superbly entertaining. The sort of entertainment where you want to grab a stranger off the street and make them watch it just to show them how gloriously insane movies can be.



One more thought: The ZING! is a Millard special. You know what I mean. Not quite a twist, more of an out-of-nowhere moment that takes you aback. *Criminally Insane* has a great one. The first *Death Nurse* had a bit of a zing but, because it was the halfway point, it's kind of calm. This installment has the Millard Zing and it is a great one, almost the Ultimate Zing. For a film that just cycles around endless and crazily, the ZING is well thought out and works. The movie ends and I smiled. Millard, you did it again. (DB)

# DEATH ROW DINER (1988)

**B. Dennis Wood**

The Noid does not live comfortably today. His royalty checks from Domino's Pizza dried up long ago. Nintendo won't even return his calls. But at least he has this movie.

What else does *Death Row Diner* have to offer besides an appearance from the Noid? This is a 68-minute, tongue-in-cheek take on the motion picture industry, as well as a 68-minute, tongue-in-cheek take on mustaches. It's also SOV. If you love the word "fuck" and Elvis impersonators and Asian stereotypes, you will love this movie.

In the late 1940s, movie mogul Otis Wilcox was sent to the electric chair for a crime he didn't commit. Present day. Wilcox's studio has fallen into the hands of flamboyant director "Wild" Bill Weston, who is currently filming in the very same prison where Otis was executed. Leading lady Julia (Michelle Bauer, who last visited the SOV Dumpster in *Terror On Tape)* lounges around in lingerie while a reincarnated Otis begins to murder everyone. Industry in-jokes are

thrown around, but none of them stick. A girl is strangled. Blood gushes out of her neck. Otis knocks a guy's eyes out with a ping-pong paddle. That made my day. So did the post-credit blooper reel.

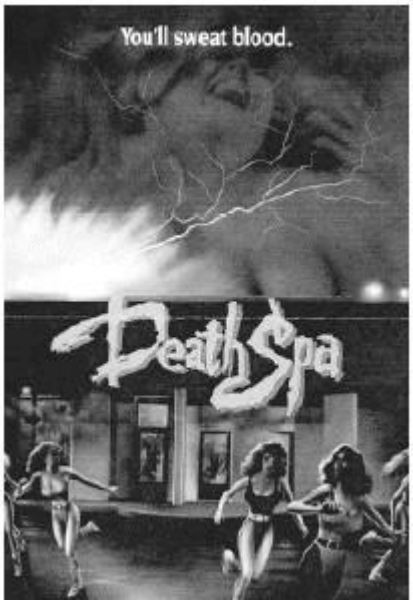
*Death Row Diner* is in dire need of some A.D.R., a soundtrack that doesn't sound like a four-year-old playing a Casio, and a joke editor. However, any SOV film that features a narrator saying, "Soon, she would come face to face with the toughest critic of them all – THE TRUTH!" can't be that bad. And it's not. This may be a moronic horror-comedy, but the defects endear it. From the onscreen plugs for *Video Violence* and *Hollywood Chainsaw Hookers* to the over-the-top performances, it's clear that one-time director B. Dennis Wood and friends just wanted to have fun. Production values are higher than most SOV escapades, but the editing and camera work stink. That's the cincher. (JZ)

# DEATH SPA (1988)
# aka WITCH BITCH

**Michael Fischa**

I just slid my keycard to get into the Star Body Health Spa, but it wouldn't work. Fuck this computer shit.

*Death Spa* is *Killer Workout* with more gore and computers, but less laughs. Then again, maybe not. Of course, other films in this book indulge in workout activity *(Invocation Satanica* and *Rocktober Blood,* just to name two), but *Death Spa* and *Killer Workout* are the only two that take place exclusively in a health club. Competition is fierce. *Death Spa* relies on misplaced *A Nightmare On Elm Street* novelties to stake its claim, as opposed to *Killer Workout*'s boob-jiggle/kill/boob-jiggle simplicity. In the end, this film asks for too much concentration on our part. But that doesn't mean we can't enjoy a few upside down hi-fives and exploding heads along the way.




Michael owns the Star Body Health Spa. It's a very futuristic place, because "the computer runs the spa." Years earlier, Michael's wheelchair-bound wife died in an inferno. Today, the spa is plagued by an unseen force, which silently kills off patrons in very irrational ways. A guy's face falls off while making out with a girl. Another guy gets ripped apart by a workout machine. A girl FUCKING BLOWS UP while staring at a mirror. Questions arise. Why was Michael's new girlfriend burned by the steam room, and why is she the only person who wears bandages for the entire film? Clearly, other people have sustained injuries that also require bandages. The fat detective asks, "How does a goddamn diving board just COME LOOSE?" So do a lot of other people. When the Mardi Gras party finally hits, Michael is besieged with paranormal researchers and an in-law with a secret. The fires burn. A female detective proclaims, "Aw, fuck this computer shit!"

*Death Spa* lays down the law early on (weight machines as "art," gigantic aluminum computers) and tries hard to maintain trash excellence. There's even a boom mic. Unfortunately, the film gets bogged down with confusion. A general reasoning behind the carnage is never fully explored, as we're left to contend with lots of characters that look the same and wear Bermuda shorts. Nevermind the bad edits, graphic gore, and full frontal nudity. The mid-section of

the film still crawls by with dull conversations and badly timed flashbacks. And where are the songs? Sorry, but instrumental guitar jack-offs do not provide a proper complement for workout scenes. Please listen to *Killer Workout's* "Rock 'n' Rock" for a definitive example. (JZ)

# DEMON QUEEN (1986)

**Donald Farmer**

A succubus rubs the crotch of a man who is not interested in having his crotch rubbed. Thirty seconds later, guts are smeared on boobs. Prepare to win!

My expectations are not high when it comes to the SOV legacy of Donald Farmer. After watching *Cannibal Hookers* or *Scream Dream,* I expect nothing but chintzy gore, sex between people who have (possibly) never had sex in their lives, and a moderate sampling of the world's shittiest synth-pop. These are the things that Farmer likes. These are the things that Farmer delivers. Every so often, he'll throw in some VFW ass-metal or a "YA DUMB FUCK!" to spice up the boring parts. But in general, my low expectations are always met. In the case of *Demon Queen,* Farmer's debut film, they're exceeded.

The loose structure, revolving around the Demon Queen and her relationship with a drug dealer, seems like an afterthought. There's no recognizable plot, and even less of an explanation. *Demon* is assembled and presented as a "movie"; one like any other in the Farmer canon. But it slowly devolves. Gore and uncomfortable sex give way to a series of no-fi video experiments, accented with neon overlays and one-note synth droning. This style is alien to the rest of Farmer's work. Like Tim Ritter's *Day Of The Reaper, Demon* finds a first-time filmmaker utilizing the fundamentals of backyard horror as a basis for dreamy disengagement. But unlike *Reaper, Demon* has a better chance of entertaining viewers who are not me.

Somehow, *Demon Queen* moves fast. Even during explorations of a mall food court or psychotropic dream sequences. Farmer always gives us something to grasp onto, an unpredictable hook that keeps us engaged. It's something we don't find in his other SOV sex-gore films, but it's something we'd hope to find in every film in this book. From ma 'n' pa video store visits to blasts of musique concrete audio experiments, *Demon* wins. It's not expected. That's why it works so well. (JZ)

# DEMON RAT (1991)
# aka LA RATA MALDITA

**Ruben Galindo Jr.**

This film starts off wonderfully. In a near-future Mexico, the smog is so bad that everyone has to wear gas masks whenever they're outside. Inside buildings and cars, there are filters that make the air breathable. A series of ecological disasters have made the world casually unlivable and also killed off many species of animals. In the home of one woman, however, some resilient rats are beginning to mutate and grow. It all has something to do with the company her father started that her soon-to-be-ex-husband now runs.

*Demon Rat* is a low-budget film but it has the strength of its convictions behind it. There are emotional scenes with the characters in gas masks that are quite good. I sense a great irony in these scenes as people express their love for one another or argue heatedly while wearing sunglasses and gas masks. Since it is a Mexican film, these scenes seem like a parody of the over-the-top dramatics of many telenovelas. It's quite clever. And, the fact that they don't go into great detail about how all of this disaster happened

leaves it up to the viewer to hunt around for answers. It's that darn rat that gets in the way. Yes, it is an example of the horrible mutating going on due to pollution and corporate greed. Yes, it does make for some creepy moments in the large house during the climax. Yes, it is a guy in a giant rat suit. OK. That's a little goofy but it's no reason to dismiss the film. The problem is with the basic structure of the film and the fact that having a giant rat running around means your film is probably going to eventually go a certain way.

It sets up this world and seems like it is about to go somewhere exciting with it. Then, the whole thing becomes a cat and mouse game in the woman's house between her, a biology teacher friend, and her crazy husband who wants to kill them both. The rat lurks around and eventually joins in. Such a large portion of this film is the chase that I almost forgot all about the first half. The decaying society flies out the window for a runaround in a house.

Some of the runaround is quite good. The acid rain is a nice touch. The atmosphere filter going off and then on and then windows breaking, letting in smog, was nice. But, after a time, it becomes too much. And, when the rat enters it, near the end, I was already past the point of "I'm enjoying this" and at the point of "This is still going on?" The film has great moments but they fade as they go. I wish the whole thing had stayed in dystopia mode. (DB)

# DEMON WARRIOR (1988)

**Frank Patterson**

After watching *Demon Warrior,* the only things I could remember were a fat guy driving his truck off a cliff and a guy with a Beethoven haircut. Towards the end, a cop barfed. Not a good sign.

During the opening minutes of this film, a man declares, “Aw no, I ain’t fallin’ for this cockamamie Indian bullshit again!” But I’ve fallen again, sucked into the promise of supernatural-Native-Americans-who-have-been-wronged and their lust for revenge. Cheaper than *Ghost Dance,* not as violent as *Scalps,* and nowhere near as charming as *Death Curse Of Tartu,* the Texas-shot *Demon Warrior* is not an impressive film. But there is one consolation. The title of “Original Music” is credited to Kirk Cameron.

Four people arrive at a secluded cabin owned by one of the guys’ great-grandfather. They get the obligatory warning from an old man. They buy brewskis. They pump gas. Suddenly, a man in a suit arrives on an airplane, checks into a hotel, and opens his suitcase. Most of this happens in slow motion. Pretty soon, an Indian spirit is

on the loose! Because great grandpa stole his land! The ghostly killer has a latex boar mask for a head, and he's also ripped like The Ultimate Warrior. Occasionally, he shoots arrows and scalps people. The man in the suit ("I'm a banking investor") attempts to help our heroes with meditation. Talking. Walking. Walking. Talking. Then, lightning literally strikes. Thunder does not follow.

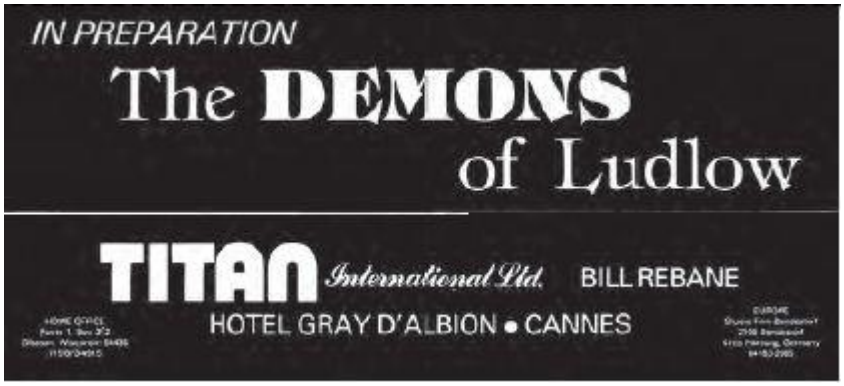
*Demon Warrior* is a bust. Aside from a spirited Yoda impression or two, the actors would rather be somewhere else. There's not much to laugh at. Padding overtakes whatever cohesiveness the script may have had and violates it to no end. The film could have benefitted from more scalps, cars blowing up, or idiotic lines. At least Kirk Cameron had the sense to blast a few synth-saxophones. He always was the coolest Seaver. (JZ)

# THE DEMONS OF LUDLOW (1983)

**Bill Rebane**

A haunted piano is delivered to the town of Ludlow just in time for their bicentennial. Of course, when the men deliver it, they don't say, "Here's your haunted piano. Where do you want it?" The haunted part is a surprise. It's a gift from the man who founded the town. And that man was a jerk. And the people of the town spend the next few days in the snow, being haunted and attacked and killed by demons from the past. It's all Pure Rebane. Bill Rebane, that is. Welcome to another entry in The Rebanery.

This is 80s Rebane. This phase brings in the gore and the nudity. He moves with the times. There's a decent overall pace and this one is loaded with the wonderful locations that all of his films have. There is also that one guy. You know him. He was in




*Invasion From Inner Earth* and *The Giant Spider Invasion.* He's got a beard and a mustache. White guy. He's pretty good.

The Man With The Beard plays the local priest who is trying to get the piano out of there. The local reporter slowly joins him in his crusade. The guy in charge of the town tries to get the priest to keep everything hush-hush so the bicentennial isn't soiled. And, the whole town begins dying in bursts of synthesizers and smoke machines and strange lighting.

There's a lot of back story in *Demons.* Unlike *The Game,* where the more we learn the less sense it makes, here the more we learn, the more it makes sense. But *Demons* could have used a little less sense. A touch of insanity would have made me more excited. No matter how hard Bill tries, there are always moments, like the swordfight, that don't quite shake the amateur feel of his earliest films. Those moments when you think, "Hmm, now why did he try to do that?" It also happens during some of the haunting/ smoky/strange lighting scenes. And, forget about the moment the haunted piano begins to bounce around the stage because . . .

I can't find a way to finish that sentence.

Maybe you should just watch the movie and decide for yourself. Mr. Rebane would be happy if you did. (DB)

# DEMONWARP (1988)

**Emmett Alston**

Bigfoot. Trivial Pursuit. George Kennedy with mismatched socks. *Demonwarp,* DO NOT FUCK THIS UP.

The challenge of crafting a perfect Bigfoot trash-gore film was more than met by *Night Of The Demon.* Mutilated Girl Scouts. Bigfoot rape. A Yeti ripping off a man's cock. That is the secret to winning. In 1988, Vidmark Entertainment produced the direct-to-video *Demonwarp* and proclaimed, "You have no idea what winning is." But, we kind of already did. For the first hour,

*Demonwarp* is pretty much *Don't Go In The Woods* with a fake Bigfoot instead of a killer with beads hanging from his face. Plus way more boobs. It's great. But then they fuck it up.

Big slob George Kennedy is enjoying a leisurely game of Trivial Pursuit when Bigfoot breaks in and kills his daughter. Then, a group of Bigfoot trackers (including Billy Jacoby aka Buddy from *Just One Of The Guys)* set up shop in the same cabin a few weeks later. For the next 30 minutes, there is all kinds of winning. Woods. Sex. Practical jokes. A sweet boombox. A Bigfoot with an Axl Rose wig peering through bushes, running, deactivating dynamite, and ripping people's heads off. Michelle Bauer *(Death Row Diner)* roaming around naked. George Kennedy calling Bigfoot a "wooly bastard" and a "six foot fleabag." There's even a random photographer kill scene, just like *Don't Go In The Woods.* Then, Bigfoot pulls a Bruce Banner and changes back into a scientist. Goddamn it.

During its final 35 minutes, *Demonwarp* goes from uncomplicated and fun to tedious and confusing. There are dimestore zombies, a wet alien puppet, spaceships, and a satanic sacrifice. Worst of all, the origins of Bigfoot are explained. Heresy! In trying to one-up previous Bigfoot films, *Demonwarp* piles on too many elements that don't gel. As the plot gets more complicated and ridiculous, the good stuff is wiped clean rather than expanded.

Also: Billy Jacoby's shameful Jack Nicholson shtick did nothing to get me through this movie. (JZ)

# DEVIL RIDER (1989)
# aka HELL'S OUTLAW

**Victor Alexander**

It's a cowboy slasher. FINALLY.

For the first eighteen minutes of *Devil Rider,* 19th century cowboys (acid-wash jeans, Doc Martens, wallet lumps in front pockets) meet their demise at the guns and/or sabre of The Devil Rider.

He over-enunciates and wears a white trenchcoat. His calling card is a laugh and it sounds like this: “Heh heh heh.” At some point, a guy on a ranch answers another guy’s question with the following retort:

“Does shit go through a goose like lightning?”

I don’t know about you, but this is the first time I’ve heard that. It made me think.

Since *Devil Rider* re-imagines *Iced* on a “dude ranch”, but with half the laughs of that coked-up classic, I had time to think. Devil Rider walked around a barn for the umpteenth time, peeping on girls in showers and shooting his tiny gun. I thought, “Is there life after death?” An old man sharpened his target skills, while quick edits revealed some tame sex in a barn. I thought, “Will I ever have money again?” Around the hour mark, after endless padding, bloodless kill scenes, and grating synth-flutes, I wondered, “Would *Devil Rider* be better if it was SOV?” Well, does shit go through a goose like lightning? (JZ)

# DEVIL STORY (1985)
# aka IL ÉTAIT UNE FOIS LE DIABLE

**Bernard Launois**

The French have their talons in me. I’m always on the lookout for another *Ogroff,* which happens to be the apex of French trash-horror cinema. Now a distant second has been discovered. Let’s clink glasses.

If you’re not on the floor in hysterics after the first hour of *Devil Story,* abandon hope. Come to think of it, thoughts of abandonment are a good starting point. *Devil Story,* the first and final horror film from enigmatic director Bernard Launois, abandons normalcy. It’s a compact, night-in-the-life campfire tale that fixates on juvenile exploitation. As a bonus, it’s also completely hilarious. Was that Launois’ intention? Who knows. Any film that can fork over a three

minute scene of blood-barfing AND an all-night hunt for a satanic horse (“Goddamn that sonuv-abitch horse!”) needs no justification.

The first ten minutes of the film feels like *Ogroff: The Early Years.* A malformed boogeyman in a peacoat scours the French countryside while murdering random travelers. Blowing blood out of a tube is the main focus here. Soon after, a couple’s car breaks down, a cat yelps at them, and they arrive at a castle that is inhabited by a couple of old farts. The old people speak of the equinox: Days as long as nights! Animals grunting! Ye olde rape and plundering! As it turns out, the mad killer and his gypsy mother not only live in the hills and kill people, but they also own a mummy. The mummy walks through a cemetery. The old man (in camouflage) spends most of the film blasting a shotgun and lobbing insults at the “devil horse.” A woman runs around. The killer falls through a brick wall. Also:

“THE LEGEND CONTINUES.”

Although my copy of *Devil Story* was dubbed in English, subtitled in Turkish, and credited in French, the film conquers all language barriers. There’s no need for translation when we’re dealing with fixations on goop in mouths, protracted cheap ’n’ nasty gore, and incessant screaming. The film contains none of the gutter poetics that lurk in the corners of Jean Rollin and Jess Franco films. Bad stunts, overly enthusiastic dubbing, Florida license plates (what?), big synths; *Devil Story* screams America. Think of it as an extreme gore version of *Dungeon Of Harrow,* but without the dullness of that 1960s “hit.” Launois could have included about fifty less instances of that horse neighing, but nobody’s perfect. (JZ)

# THE DEVIL’S GIFT (1984)

**Kenneth J. Berton**

There is a little toy monkey that becomes possessed. A young boy is given the monkey as a birthday gift. The monkey begins to systematically kill his way up the family food chain. Only Dad knows what’s going on. Only he can stop the evil of *The Devil’s Gift.*

*The Devil's Gift* is a 90-minute movie and that is the entire plot. This would have made a decent half-hour or hour-long *Twilight Zone* episode. At its current length, all I can do is applaud the efforts of all involved. The film never lost me but it rarely grabbed me. It moves glacially from event to event. And I think the director knew it because he edited the film down quite a bit to make it the second half of his film *Merlin's Shop Of Mystical Wonders,* with Ernest Borgnine.

The whole thing looks a lot like an after school special that never really found the issue it was after. There is a widowed dad raising a son in a lovely Don Dohler-esque suburb. He has a best friend next door who he pals around with all the time. Dad talks to his mother regularly and has a nice girlfriend. It all seems like it's waiting for alcoholism or some such malady to rear its head. But instead, we get a possessed monkey toy.

Because it has that after school special feel and it never goes beyond PG scares, I believe my mother might like this movie. She likes to be scared but not too much. She'd have a lot to say about this film. She'd focus on how sweet the little boy is and the meanness of the monkey toy. Personally, I feel like I should say more, but my mind keeps spinning in circles. Try as I might, I have no strong opinions about *The Devil's Gift* either way. I can see that it's slow and goes on for far too long, but a part of me really liked it. However, I'm not sure I can use that criteria to send someone after a movie. Not when *The Last Slumber Party* remains unwatched by at least one person. (DB)

# DISCONNECTED (1983)

**Gorman Bechard**

Alicia works in a video store. Her apartment is decorated with a poster for the film *Neighbors* and a novelty bust of Groucho Marx. She listens to bands that sound like lo-fi versions of Squeeze. I think I'm in love.

For exactly half of its running length, *Disconnected* does things right. It's *The Driller Killer* for the suburbs – gritty, yet forged with sober hands. The first feature from writer-director Gorman Bechard

*(Psychos In Love* and *Cemetery High), Disconnected* is a consuming experience in zero-budget, early 80s experimentation. There are photograph montages, fourth-wall breaking interviews, and a focus on inanimate objects rather than humans. At some point, the script ran out of pages, but everyone kept shooting. That's the only problem.

An old man uses the telephone at Alicia's apartment. He leaves. Night falls. The cops are searching for a psychosexual killer, whom they dub "The Slasher." Alicia hangs out at a bar with her sister Barbara Ann (who is also played by Alicia), her boyfriend Mike, and some other guy. A band rips through an entire song. Is Mike sleeping with Barbara Ann? Voices on the telephone and overheard conversations tell Alicia "YES." A fey guy named Franklin pines for Alicia. They date. He has a secret. A telephone rings relentlessly. Eventually, Alicia smashes the phone, but it's too late. For her, and for us.

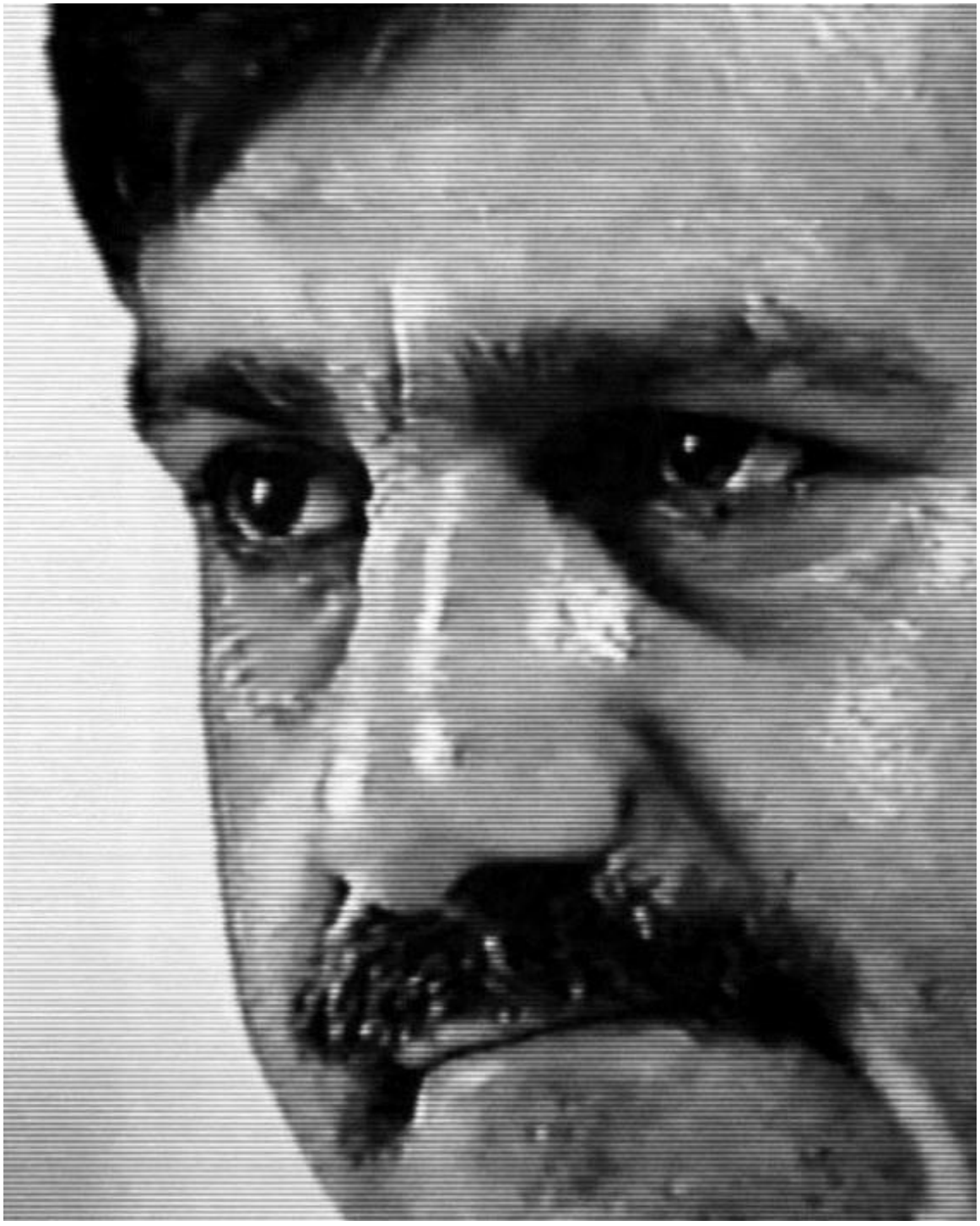
You'll mourn the build up. You'll curse the ending. But *Disconnected* is an artsy bedroom horror film that you can actually watch and appreciate even though you are not the director. Ambient noises, creative camera placements, and unexpected editing tricks work well with the cold visuals, skewed sex, and splattery violence. Acting is surprisingly earnest. But this film needs a suitable pay-off that never arrives. What does arrive is a repetitive series of questions that get less and less intriguing as the climax approaches. When it hits, answers are withheld. Trash films can thrive within these types of loose ends, and some, like *Frozen Scream,* define themselves because of it. *Disconnected* had bigger plans. They didn't come together. (JZ)

# DOCTOR BLOODBATH (1988)

**Nick Millard**

Somebody had to bring abortions and slashers together. I'm glad Nick Millard was the one to do it.

Successful filmmaking is about cutting away the mundane, focusing on specifics, and presenting a world that can be understood and digested in approximately 90 minutes. In *The General,* we don't see Buster Keaton clean his bathroom. We see him balance on the edge of a careening locomotive with nothing but a wood plank for support. In *Female Prisoner Scorpion: Beast Stable,* we don't watch



Meiko Kaji buy her iconic black trench coat. We watch her chop off a man's arm to remove her handcuffs. *Doctor Bloodbath,* the last late 80s Nick Millard SOV film, does not work like this. It is preoccupied with the mundane. We see people looking at the ground, talking about rent money, and putting perfume on old boobs. This is not

informed or successful filmmaking. However, we do learn that abortions are achieved by waving an ear-flushing kit in front of a vagina.

Gordon from *Death Nurse* and *Death Nurse 2* runs a health clinic. The phone rings. An elderly nurse answers and says, “Why yes, we perform abortions here. Shall I put you down for 3 P.M.?” After each operation, Gordon shows up at the patient’s home, injects her with drugs, and kills her. He uses a knife, a hammer, a screwdriver, and a meat cleaver to do this. Between killings, Gordon drives his white sedan on the San Francisco streets. He also sits down at a desk or on a couch and stares into space while twiddling his thumbs or clenching his fists. Meanwhile, Gordon’s wife is having an affair with a poet, who is of unknown European descent. He doesn’t speak English very well, but has many lines. The wife looks to be in her mid-fifties. When the poet gets the wife pregnant, the wife says, “That dirty rotten no good Polack son of a bitch!” Then she turns to Gordon for help. This involves stabbing a plastic doll with a butcher knife, aka

AN ABORTION.

Like all of Nick Millard’s films, *Doctor Bloodbath* runs just over 60 minutes. And, like *Criminally Insane II* and *Gunblast,* this movie is filled with shockingly terrible compositions, uncomfortable bouts of silence, and rapid fire edits of repeated footage. It has the same languid actors playing the same languid roles, though with different character names. Elements are reused across all of his films so often (Gordon’s car, that cemetery footage from *Criminally Insane,* the house from every Millard film spanning 1976-1988), that the blurring of boundaries between the movies becomes inevitable. The netherworld that Millard creates for his characters never changes. It just spreads, organically, in 60-minute increments. Still, *Doctor Bloodbath* surpasses *Criminally Insane II* and the *Death Nurse* films in terms of entertainment. It has a plot and introduces secondary characters. There’s less pillaging of footage from past Millard triumphs. Except when Gordon kills his maid. That scene is stitched

together with a maid-killing scene from *Satan's Black Wedding,* which would be fine except that the maids are not the same.

Very few people should be asked to sit through Millard's SOV films. But *Doctor Bloodbath* is different. The mundane elements are so opposite of what we're familiar with that everything we see becomes exhilarating. The film never spends too much time focusing on any one element. Plus, every single person who appears onscreen will make you gasp, barf, or ask, "Is he/ she OK?" This includes the bearded man who slowly waves his hands at us during the last three minutes of the film. We've never seen him before this happens. (JZ)

# DON'T GO IN THE WOODS (1981)

**James Bryan**

*Don't Go In The Woods* stymied me for years. Was I watching the most clueless horror film ever made? Or was it something cleverer than that? This is a film filled with strange performances, weird characters and patently impossible situations, such as a man in a wheelchair exploring the mountains of Utah on his own. A small budget doesn't automatically preclude stamping an intelligent sensibility on a film. Could this film be up to something?

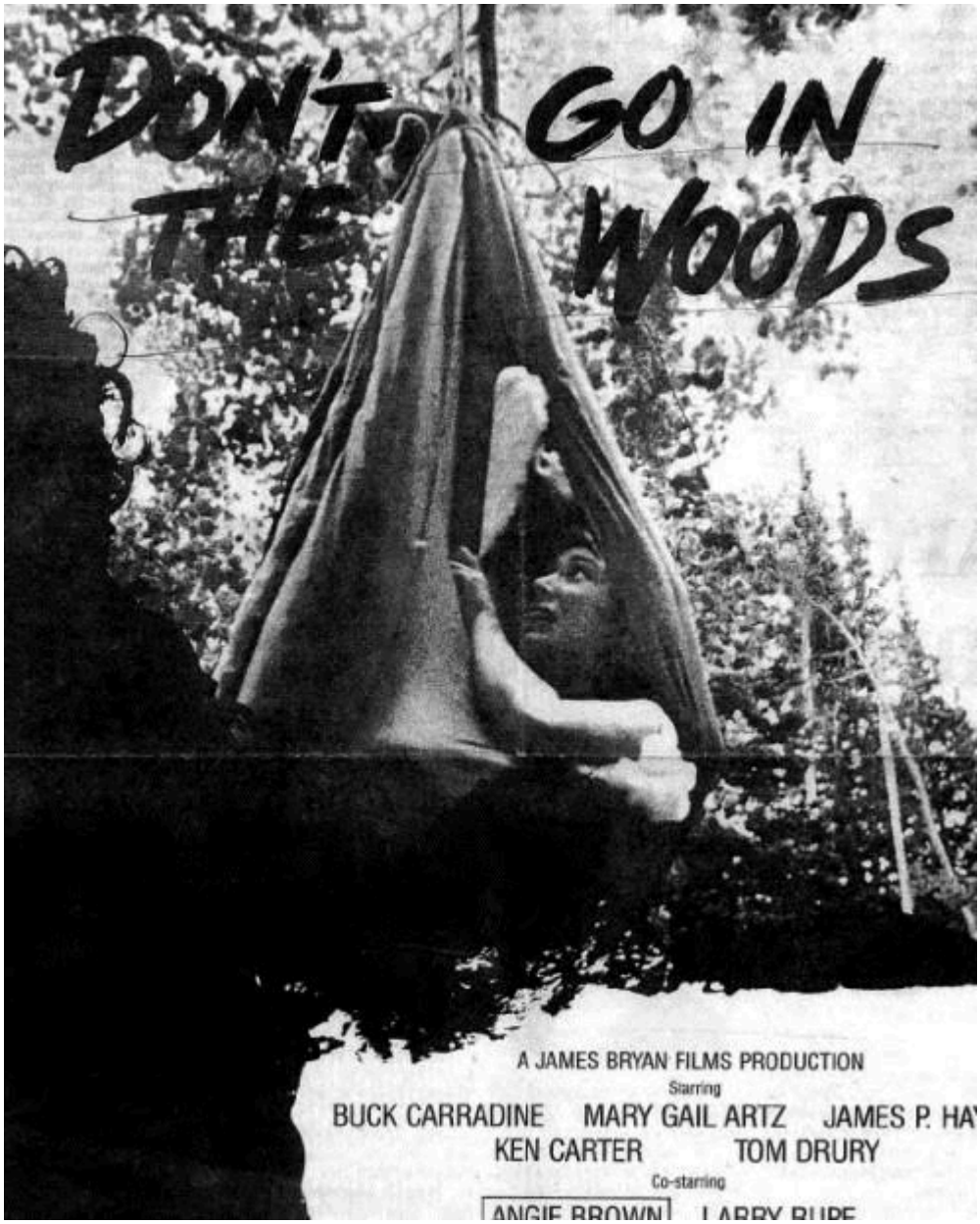
The plot of the movie is basic. Joanie, Ingrid, Craig and Peter go backpacking in the mountains. A mountain man begins killing them. A Fat Sheriff and a slim deputy hunt him down. The killer also begins randomly bumping off an oddball assortment of visitors to the deep woods. There is a lot of gore. A badly dressed ornithologist gets his arm lopped off. A man and his mom are taking photos of nothing in particular before they are sliced up. There's that man in a wheelchair who gets decapitated. A woman is strung up in a sleeping bag and pelted with rocks. Then, there's Cherry and Dick.

Cherry and Dick are an older couple who are newly married. They have taken their honeymoon to the mountains in an old VW bus. The bus is decked out with lace, red velvet hearts and a poster of Farrah Fawcett. They are homely people but their love knows no bounds.

They are also named Cherry and Dick. Did I mention that? I'm not sure why it took so long to realize that their names were Cherry and Dick. Maybe because it was too obvious. Any film that presents two newly married characters named Cherry and Dick knows what it's up to. You don't pick two names like that by accident.

The killings are as serious as a heart attack. They are violent, gory, and sudden. The chase sequences in the second half with Peter and Ingrid are treated seriously. They get wounded. They get dirty. But much of this film is having fun. It's doing it in such a way that you can, as I did, spend years watching it and think you're laughing at a bad movie when, in actuality, the movie wants you to join it. It's not jokey or self-referential. No one ever throws up their hands and yells "We're just goofing!" James Bryan made the best horror movie he could with very little money and in rough conditions high in the mountains. He just happened to have an odd sense of humor that kept appearing throughout in incidental moments.

*Don't Go In The Woods* confounds, confuses, and causes scratching of heads. Not a lot of films are made this way. They either clue you in right away that they're joking, like *Psychos in Love,* or they don't know that they're being foolish, like *Satan's Blade.* This film is in on the joke all the way. It is gory, violent and scary. But those moments happen alongside some very silly bits. The aforementioned wheelchair man, Cherry and Dick, and the law enforcement, who never seem to take the disappearances of people in the woods too seriously, are a few examples. *Don't Go In the Woods* is what it is. That's why it is a film I've watched more times than I care to say. That's why I know that I will probably be watching it as you read this. (DB)


DON'T GO IN THE WOODS
A JAMES BRYAN FILMS PRODUCTION
Starring
BUCK CARRADINE MARY GAIL ARTZ JAMES P. HA
KEN CARTER TOM DRURY
Co-starring
ANGIE BROWN LARRY BURE

# DON'T OPEN 'TIL CHRISTMAS (1984)

**Edmund Purdom**

*Don't Open 'Til Christmas* is a raunchy UK slasher about a guy that kills people who are dressed like Santa Claus. You don't watch it because you're excited to see two guys talking in an office, as in *Rescue Force.* You watch it because you're excited to see Santa get castrated while he's taking a leak. *Don't* delivers both of these things. But, it delivers way too much of the former and not enough of the latter. Fast-forwarding is not a problem.

It's a disco Christmas party! And people are wearing costumes! Santa gets a sword through his face. Two people are fucking! In a car! Santa gets his face smashed with a tire iron. A prostitute is wearing a red coat with white trim! She looks nothing like Santa! She gets a knife in the gut. Some ineffectual cops discuss the murders ("It was the costume! He was the victim of another Santa murder!") and a couple has relationship problems. An establishing shot of the Scotland Yard sign is abused at least five times. There's an attempted murder in a peepshow booth. A hack-job band plays an ENTIRE song. An old man dressed as Santa rides his bicycle into some sort of public art installation. More Santas die by knife-boot to the groin, roasted chestnuts, and face-melting. The killer's problem has something to do with sex. Of course.

*Don't Open 'Til Christmas* is a mess. Continuity errors (a main character is released from custody before we see him get arrested), sloppy photography (people bump into the camera), and poorly dubbed lines keep the film from being taken as anything but total garbage. And that's just fine. This is rank filmmaking that exists solely to give us ultra-sleazy gore within a Christmas context. No one working on the film, including director Edmund Purdom aka the killer from *Pieces,* cared about anything else but that. And they did a good

job. They also did a good job of dedicating 85% of the film to people sitting at desks and talking. Regrettably, that's what you remember most after watching.

*Rescue Force* is the same way. But, it has title cards that read, "KIKI AND ANGEL'S FAVORITE RESTAURANT, 5:30 P.M.", followed by a tank exploding. The ineptitude of *Don't* isn't extreme enough to endear its empty spaces. Most people will find it exhausting. Others will recognize the beauty in sitting through an 85-minute film just to see Santa get stabbed in the groin. I know how I feel. (JZ)

# DON'T PANIC (1989)
# aka DIMENSIONES OCULTAS

**Rubén Galindo Jr.**

It's cinematic confectionary time with Mike, Tony, Alex and Virgil. Mike is our lead guy. He looks almost grown up but he spends an awful lot of time wearing pajamas that have some awesome dinosaurs on them. These are the sort of dinosaurs that want to play with you instead of eating you. Tony is Mike's best friend except he's real rude to Mike and will randomly break into obnoxious laughter. He's literally a character you want to punch in the face. Alex is the new girl who falls for Mike. She's as cute as cute can be. Her distractingly lycanthropic eyebrows are the only things that keep her from the perfection that angels alone are allowed. Virgil is the almost-wisecracking spirit released when Mike and Tony mess around with a Ouija board. Virgil haunts Mike's mind and begins killing his friends.

*Don't Panic* bypasses logic, characterizations, structure and everything else that gets in the way of teens partying, teens possessed and teens dying. Yes, there is an alcoholic mom. But, she is so blatantly alcoholic that it's funny. There's a dad who seems to have stepped in from a completely different Mexican movie. He is big and blustery with lots of "I have to make my family money! That's my job!" type talk. Within a few minutes of meeting one another, Mike

and Alex are having a musical montage where they are falling in love. This movie cooks along at a pace you only get from master storytellers in complete charge of their narrative or people utterly unconcerned with story and aiming squarely for the juicy center of thrills and wows.

Two elements encapsulate perfectly what is so great about this film:

1. Mike's PJs. There are some who would say that they may be the real stars of the film. He spends entire scenes running around in them and, yes, it is very amusing. He even throws a temper tantrum in them. He's in his room and he's angry. In a manic fit of bluster, he begins tearing posters of cars apart and knocking things over in slow motion. But, all the slow-mo does is show off the fact that Mike wants to tear his room apart but really doesn't seem to want to ruin his stuff. I would have been the same way at his indeterminate age. Protect the Samantha Fox posters at all cost.

2. The theme song, written and sung by Mike. It's called "Don't Panic" and runs over the somber but hopeful closing credits. First, imagine the most 80s song you can think of, complete with drum machines and synths. Then, don't record it in a state-of-the-art studio. Instead, record it in a garage or closet with a 4-track but a lot of heart. That's what the theme song sounds like. That's what the movie feels like.

So, please, pour yourself some Mountain Dew aka White Trash Champagne. Mexican food is optional but may be appropriate. Tell your favorite person that they'll enjoy this. Then, sit back with them, get comfy and enjoy *Don't Panic.* (DB)

# DREAM SLAYER (1982)
# aka BLOOD SONG

**Alan J. Levi**

In *Dream Slayer,* Frankie Avalon trades in his swim trunk short-shorts and terrible songs about beach balls for a hatchet and a

wooden flute. So yes. This is a slasher that features Frankie Avalon as an escaped mental patient who stalks a teenage girl. The girl wears metal leg braces. I can't figure out exactly why anything in this movie happened, but that's not the point. The point is that whenever someone says, "Stop it with that damn flute!" or "You're not supposed to be playin' that damn flute!", Frankie kills them.

Portland, Oregon, 1955. Young Frankie witnesses the slaying of his mother and her lover at the hands of his father. Dad makes himself eat a bullet. Frankie plays his flute. Stanford Bay, Oregon, 1982. Frankie escapes the mental ward and leaves a trail of dead orderlies. Frankie plays his flute. Marion is a teenager with leg problems, an abusive alcoholic father, and an "experienced" boyfriend ("Wanna go to Porker Flats?"). When Marion sleeps, she has dreams that appear to us in negative. She also shares a psychic link with Frankie, enabling her to hone in on his killings while they happen. A skinny sheriff (Blasphemy!) sleeps, avoids work, and sports a killer toupee. Everyone ends up at a sawmill, but no one gets cut in half.

Despite the plot threads that never connect and an empty final act, *Dream Slayer* is a satisfying hodgepodge of gloom, creeps and genuine laughs. This includes a "Beat The Baloney" t-shirt. Avalon

goes nuts in the “bug-eyed crazy face” department and never stops. That unleashed attitude is a little something extra that enhances an otherwise derivative slasher. It’s what sets this film apart from time-wasters like *Funeral Home* and *Ghost Dance.* As a complement to Avalon’s performance, Marion’s homelife often dips into after school special territory. Dad screams at Marion over breakfast. Mom yells at Dad over dinner. Dad chastises Marion’s need for leg braces. Then, Marion says, “Dad, if you hadn’t been so drunk and run into that car, I wouldn’t be a cripple, now would I?” (JZ)

# DREAMANIAC (1986)

**David Decoteau**

Credits are not just informative. Sometimes they can enrich your viewing experience. “Insurance Services – Robert Looney Brokerage.” My dad was an adjuster for their automobile division. Another credit reads “Erotic Illustrations by Atila.” Didn’t she/ he specialize in vagina dioramas draped in velvet? The writer, Helen Richmond, is a pseudonym for the director. After seeing some names that looked suspicious, I began to think that every name I saw was probably a pseudonym for the director. The credits are almost more fun than the film.

Adam is a heavy metal rocker who spends most of his time sitting on a mattress with a guitar. His girlfriend, Pat, is a vivacious, friendly gal who is far too accepting of Adam and his antisocial “artist” ways. Adam chants over some candles and calls forth Lily, a succubus. She spends the movie killing everyone at a sorority party as Adam goes more and more insane. There is a twist, which is a bit farfetched. Then there is a second twist, which explains the first one and justifies the semi-jokey tone of the film. Then, there is a third twist. Frankly, the director went one twist too far. That one stung.

There’s a bunch of male and female nudity. There’s a lot of gore. There’s a good scary musical theme that gets backed with a drum machine beat. This makes the theme one that you can jog to.

For an evening's viewing in 1986 or beyond, this would have been fun. All the sorority gals are endlessly bitchy. The fraternity guys are either annoying or clearly gay but always hitting on women. I don't think it was taken too seriously as some of the actors seem to be just barely stifling smiles throughout. The overall 80s atmosphere led me to enjoy the film immensely. But, I wasn't as excited about the banter and rambling around between all of the nudity and violence.

Before writing this review, I thought I had never seen this movie. The trailer, yes. It was on the tape with *Headless Eyes.* The movie, no. But, as I watched, there were scenes I felt like I had seen before, all of which weren't on the trailer. The naked guy in the hallway. Lily covered with blood in the bathtub. The awkward way she licks her lips. The man in his underpants tied to the pole in an "erotic" manner. Adam losing his head. So, had I seen it? Lily, do you have something to do with this? Are you in my head somewhere hiding behind memories of other films? I'd hate to think that my pleasant memories of *Condorman* are hiding a murderous succubus.

If Lily is in my mind after all these years, I wonder if she's figured out how to act sexy? Lily is a succubus but she is so unsexy it's amazing and amusing. She does appear in multi-colored stirrup pants that sent my memory back to high school and my first steady girlfriend. I

appreciated the Proustian rush there. Of the three leads, Pat is the only one who I believed in the slightest. She's charming. The actor playing Adam never convinces as a heavy metal guy. In the end, he's seen as a writer and he's even less convincing. I'll stick with Pat. No succubae for me. (DB)

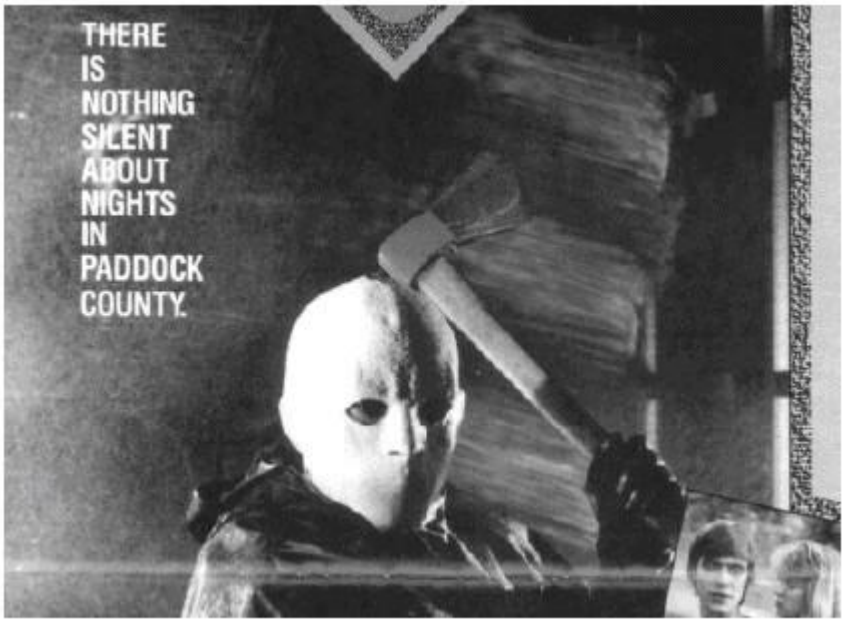
# EDGE OF THE AXE (1988)

**José Ramon Larraz**

Prepare your libido for MAXIMUM RANDOM-ACCESS

MEMORY.

José Ramon Larraz was no stranger to beautifully photographing beautiful women in the 70s. He crafted artsy, erotic sleaze, everything from serious chamber dramas with lots of sex *(Symptoms)* to over-the-top vampire epics with lots of sex *(Vampyres).* All of his films placed female characters front and center, often without their clothes on. But that was then. By the 80s, Larraz's sense of style had vanished, along with his interest in filling horror films with boobs and bush. Following the similarly-constructed-yet-completely-dull *Rest In Pieces, Edge Of The Axe* is a boring, unin-ventive slasher with a unique hook. Namely, the ladies in this movie find computer terms such as "memory logs" and "central terminal" to be intensely sexy.




We have entered the forests of Northern California. A killer, clad in a Michael Myers knock-off mask and a rain slicker, enjoys hacking people and animals to death with a shiny axe. He also hangs around a car wash. While that's happening, two guys (one computer expert, one exterminator) drive around. Both of them repeat jokes. One follows a punch line with, "You can say that again!" And then he does. The computer wiz has invented e-mail and the Internet, and his computer talks of its own free will. He installs a computer in his new girlfriend's house. She's also a member of the world's worst church choir. Meanwhile, the killing continues. A woman weeps about bankruptcy and her younger, cheating husband (the exterminator). None of this ties together.

*Edge Of The Axe* is a series of casual contradictions. MIDI country rock mixes with 80s hip-hop. Realistic kill scenes alternate with boring scenes on a speedboat. The sheriff (mid-sized, not fat) flubs his lines and mumbles instead of saving the world. Larraz shows off his old stylish eye whenever the killer shows up (creative camera angles, colored lights), but he tends to play it safe everywhere else. While nobody has sex, the girls do deliver a flurry of computer innuendoes. "You can jog MY memory logs any time!" (JZ)

# ELVES (1989)

**Jeff Mandel**

We've got Nazis, the phrase "art deco boobs," and a skinned A.L.F. puppet. Unfortunately, we don't have a movie.

Shot in Denver on 16mm and released straight to video, *Elves* sets up hundreds of laughable plot threads, forgets about them, and assumes that its audience read the script beforehand. But even if we did, the movie still wouldn't make sense. That's proactive filmmaking.

A trio of forty-something women (masquerading as teens in this movie) call themselves "The Sisters of Anti-Christmas." Kirstin, the brains of the operation, works at a mall. The other girls make dick jokes. When the Sisters raise a Nazi elf from the dead, it's up to Dan Haggerty ("Call me Ace") and his cigarettes to kick some ass while lovingly abusing the term "goddamn" every five seconds. As for the elf, Nazis were breeding elves during WWII. At two feet high and with no facial expressions, they were to become the "ultimate super soldiers." The Nazis promised/ projected/predicted that on Christmas Eve in 1989, an elf would rise and mate with a pure virgin to create a master race.

In other news, Kirstin's little brother describes his run-in with the elf: "It was a fucking little ninja troll." A department store Santa asks for "oral," snorts some cocaine, and gets his cock sliced off with a razor blade. By the elf. There are also guns.

*Elves* is a vortex of incompetence, nonsense, and low budget handicaps. The sexual elements (incest, rape by Nazi elf) and the lack of humor with which they're presented give the film an air of ugliness. Plus, it's poorly executed, even in the realm of late 80s no-budget trash. "Old man" wrinkles that were drawn on with eyeliner. An atrocious plastic keyboard score. Drastic, incomprehensible jumps in narrative. The actors seem to be having a terrible time, caught somewhere between just waking up and being severely constipated. Every decision the filmmakers made was dead wrong,

including the decision to make a film about Nazi elves on Christmas. The film ends after someone screams, “DIE, YOU LITTLE FAGGOTS!” (JZ)

# EVIL LAUGH (1988)

**Dominick Brascia**

Halfway through *Evil Laugh,* I walked to the living room window, opened it, and sighed. The cool December air hit my face. Peering at Chicago’s skyline, I said to myself, “You are the only person within a one thousand mile radius watching *Evil Laugh* at this very moment. Therefore, you are a masterpiece of a man.”

Just when I think I’ve laughed my last laugh in the mesmerizing universe of terrible slashers, *Evil Laugh* steps in and entices me with a house-cleaning montage, dozens of homoeroticisms, and the fattiest-fatty-fat sheriff of them all. But, we all know that tongue-in-cheek comedy in a late 80s slasher is certain death. We’ve seen it in *Dreamaniac* and *Flesh Eating Mothers,* just to name two. *Evil Laugh* piles it on. But then the killer shows up in dishpan gloves and a pair of orthopedic Nikes (complete with gray velcro). All is forgiven.

A group of college interns (aged 27 to 38) convene at a secluded California mansion. Their friend, Jerry, is studying to be a pediatrician. Everyone decides to help Jerry get the house in shape for his new practice. Buff bros in short-shorts pepper their conversations with “Help us load the jack and tighten our nuts!” and “C’mon, rub yourself . . . like this!” All of the sudden, there’s a naked guy’s ass, a guy’s groping hand on that ass, and a big-boobed girl’s faux-ecstasy, all for the naked guy’s practical joke. Move over, Henny Youngman! The killer cackles like Popeye and blood flows. Someone’s head is baked in a microwave and someone else gets a sledgehammer to the eyes. Sometimes metal songs overlap each other. They’re not very good.

Lame *Fangoria* references. Reaction shots galore. A gay actor failing to convince us otherwise. Questions whirled. Is it possible for a man

to breathe while wearing such confining jockey shorts? Does the crashing of a lamp really sound like the pay-off of a slot machine?

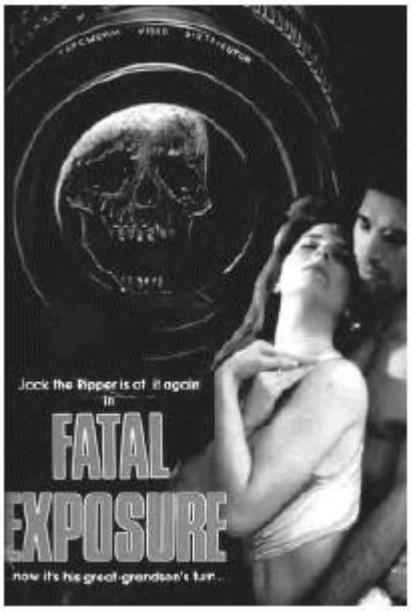
Can people accidentally piss on each other in broad daylight? *Evil Laugh* has the market cornered on that most popular 1980s horror sub-genre: the gay slasher-comedy. It also has the market cornered on almost satisfying an audience. (JZ)

# FATAL EXPOSURE (1989)

**Peter B. Good**

Rippington! Jack Rippington, that is. He's Jack the Ripper's grandson and he lives in a large house in Alabama with your Big Fat Mamma. I'm joking there. Please don't tell your Big Fat Mamma that I said that. Well, Jack is a photographer, specializing in photos featuring death and mayhem. He's kind of hunky. And his hunky seed is waiting patiently for the perfect woman to father his son. Each woman who sparks his fancy is asked the same questions about blood, murder and death. Will he ever find the right one? When will Jack Rippington IV be born?

*Fatal Exposure* has a pretty straightforward plot with several detours into gore and some softcore fooling around. Jack, with one huge mullet, talks to the camera a lot. He talks about his life, his grandfather, his philosophies, etc. It seems pretty serious but I had a little smile on my face throughout his many rants.




The film is a pretty standard late 80s regional horror film. And that should get most of you to rush out and watch it because that is exactly what we're after here. When I say a film is "standard" and you examine the standard and discover that it is based in Crazy, then you want to watch everything you can in that realm. If you like 70s progressive rock and you hear someone say, "This is just like Genesis, Yes, or Jethro Tull," that would be a recommendation. That's what I'm doing here. Is it a Super Thumbs Up recommendation meaning that you should kill for a copy of this movie? No, it's not. Please, let the movies be crazy, not us.

Speaking of crazy, why do people go crackers so often at the end of these films? In this one, Jack locks his love in the basement for a few days. Why couldn't this make her stronger? Why does it have to make her go loopy? Aren't the police eventually going to come to his place and find her crazy and Jack, well, dead? Isn't there a great chance that she'll get blamed for everything? That's not good. The movie doesn't think past its ending and, frankly, it shouldn't.

They got the film made and they got it on video. They achieved their goal. Jack Rippington away! I think the plot is a bit too straight on for my tastes. That makes this one of those films that is fun to watch every six months to a year. It's not superb but it has verve. It has

Jack and his mullet. It has a lovely young lady in the lead. It has several killings that are rather sloppy. It doesn't have much narrative drive but that's OK. Watch it, live it,

Rip it! (DB)

# FATAL GAMES (1984)
# aka THE KILLING TOUCH

**Michael Elliot**

I don't just live life. I attack it. So when the theme song from *Fatal Games* told me to "Take it to the limit!," I jumped off the couch, ran a two minute mile, and dunked a basketball from a freethrow line that was located one town over.

*Fatal Games* takes the locker room rulebook and pisses all over it. Steroids are legal. People wear leg-casts over their dress slacks. Hot dogs land in laps. Like *Graduation Day,* this is a sports team slasher that's unconcerned with the concepts of reality and filmmaking aptitude. Not counting, of course, the lesbionic gym teacher. She's just like real life. So are the buzzsaw synths that will most definitely cut you in half.

If you're expecting a plot recap, forget it. All I know is that a group of random Olympic hopefuls are training for a competition called "The Nationals," which never happens. Instead, a killer in shiny workout pants skewers the kids with a very large javelin pole. In the pool. In the weight room. In the sauna. For some reason, everybody wants to know what happened to Nancy. There's something about a sex change and a poor GPA in there too, but I didn't understand why.

*Fatal Games* sounds average, but I assure you that this film is anything but. The whole thing might climax with a guy on crutches hopping in a hallway, but we need that downtime. Whitey-tighties that look like adult diapers. Javelins that travel the length of a football field. “Retardation injections.” Heartwarming scenes of inept father-daughter bonding, followed by a nude woman running through a school for five minutes. You’d think it would all peak with the greatest bogus broken leg of all time, but no! The dingy sets, laughable inspirational speeches, and rampant nudity all take it to the limit. (JZ)

# FATAL IMAGES (1989)

**Dennis Devine**

*Fatal Images* introduced the concepts of wearing one’s pajamas under one’s clothes (“It saves time at night!”) and decorating police stations with spice racks and *Lethal Weapon* posters. That explains why sweat is pouring from my brow. This thing is all kinds of hot.

Serial killer Mr. Cosgrove is an aesthete. You see, “His murders are like works of art!,” so we know his V-DELUX camera that takes-your-picture-and-then-you-die schtick is no put-on. Ten years after Cosgrove commits suicide via self portrait, the camera appears in “Lucky Eric’s Pawnshop” aka director Dennis

Devine's garage. Amy, a photographer who struggles between "making a living" and "making art," buys it. She takes photos of people. They die, yet her prints seem to telegraph each death AFTER it happens. The plot thickens! Cosgrove's satanic ghost. Arms ripped off. Guts pulled out. Amy's roommate Jen and her pajama tips. A bikini model who says "pitcher" instead of "picture." Father Dana, purveyor of the splatter-paint dress shirt. From out of nowhere, the band Teaser blesses us with arena metal played on a VFW playing field. And then the guy in the bar with those giant sunglasses does an impression of Dan Aykroyd.

Director Dennis Devine *(Dead Girls)* spread out $10,000, obsessed over extreme close-ups, and had faith in way-too-loud sound effects. The resulting film introduces a new level of SOV eminence. Art? Satan? Teaser? I want it all. *Fatal Images* is ingrained with the living room production values of *The Hackers,* the violent spittle of *Spine,* and the hysterical datedness of *Woodchipper Massacre.* It's a triumphant funnel of SOV charm that doesn't degrade. The film pounces upon its initial bashfulness, building to a confused crescendo that offers irrational behavior, a few scares, and luscious late 80s hilarity. Smoke machines! Computer programming! A cop who commits suicide! I can offer no criticism. (JZ)

# FATAL PULSE (1988)

**Anthony J. Christopher**

*Fatal Pulse* ended. I couldn't remember what day it was. I tried to pour a glass of water to refresh myself, but the water ended up in my shoes. In a panic, I dumped the water out of my shoes and placed them on my feet. They wouldn't stay on because I couldn't remember how to tie them. Grasping around the room, I picked up a framed photograph of a gorgeous woman. An inscription read: "To my #1 hunky queerbag lover! Luv, Chris", but I had no recollection of her. This was serious. *Fatal Pulse* had stolen my intellect and made me stupid.

You want to get real? Sorority house. Black-gloved killer. Tons of irregular boobs. Transcendental comic relief. Workout scenes. Death by vinyl LP. Super-gay-man-in-real-life-cast-as-a-total-la-dies'-man-in-the-film.'Nam vet (played by Joe Estevez). After-sex thank you card. Martin Mayo.

Who is Martin Mayo?

He is the musical score composer. His title reads, "Musical Score Composed By", but it should read: "Virtuoso In A Sea Of Tone-Deaf Philistines Who Is Also More Talented Than Beethoven." Where *Nightbeast* forever changed the landscape of "sex," Mayo's Guitar Center-meets-Right Said Fred magnum opus forever altered the concept of "music." Now, it should all be clear to you.

When the sorority house killings begin, the girls do not vacate the premises. When the 'Nam vet has flashbacks, we hear the screams of a baby. When tough guy Brad makes a threat, you can bet his three-foot spiked mullet that he goddamn means it.

I won't even mention the appearance of Captain Marvelous. *Fatal Pulse* is little more than a showcase for sweaty boobs and the talents of comic relief character Mark. You'll know he's coming, thanks to the "BOING!" sound effect, novelty baseball cap, and "WHAT IT IS?" t-shirt. This is the apex of 1980s stupidity.

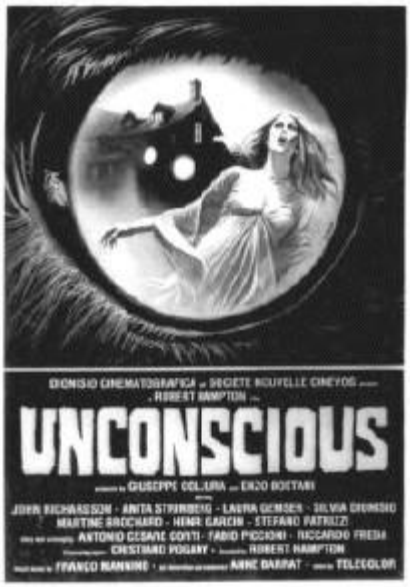
Around the hour mark, *Fatal Pulse* grinds to a halt and encourages sleep. After the bombardment of musical genius Martin Mayo, co-medic genius Mark, and an imbecilic cast, who fucking cares? (JZ)

# FEAR (1981)
# aka MURDER SYNDROME aka UNCONSCIOUS

**Riccardo Freda**

I've taken a couple of road trips before. They usually involve pretzels, Trainland USA, and France Gall compilations. They never involve chainsaws, Satanists, or spiders with four-foot leg spans. What is my problem?

*Fear* is the second-to-last production from genre director Riccardo Freda. This French-Italian co-production starts out as a standard slasher, but evolves into a dreamy, inconsistent experiment. It feels like what might have happened if Eurocine asked Jean Rollin to complete a half-finished slasher instead of *Zombie Lake.* Basically, a group of road-trippers end up at an old mansion.




Then, bad things happen. There's also a guy named "The Maestro." And incest!

Michael Stanford is a "famous" actor, fresh off of his latest horror film. On impulse, he and girlfriend Deborah pack up and take to the

country to visit his elderly mother for the weekend. But Mom's not so old. In fact, she looks to be the same age as Michael. As we sweep that fact under the rug, *Fear* unloads some hot juice. Full frontal nudity. Rape. Burning crosses. Surreal dream landscapes filled with skeletons. Eventually, Michael's film pals arrive, including Laura Gemser aka Emanuelle, and the twists begin. Listless sex. Sketchy pasts. And the director of the film-within-a-film who acts very, very gay.

*Fear* hits more than it misses. It's a pleasantly skewed mix of frightening imagery, immersive locations, and perverted sex. The script and direction move fast, and most of the surprises catch you off guard. The metamorphosis of the film from lethargic slasher to something more experimental was impressive, and made even more enjoyable by the flashing breasts, overacting, and terrible post-dubbing. There's also style and peculiarity to spare. No matter how many times *Fear* takes the lazy way out (scenes of people sitting in a living room and talking), there's usually something substantial to pull you back in. Like a chicken beheading. (JZ)

# FIEND (1980)

**Don Dohler**

Don Dohler's always up to something. Just ask his neighbors.

The mythology Dohler creates for *Fiend* is pretty decent. A glowing red spirit, shaped a bit like a gargoyle, flies over a graveyard and inhabits the body of a dead man. The strange spirit needs to kill to survive. That's unfortunate but it's not too surprising to me. There aren't a lot of bright red, floating spirits inhabiting corpses that need to make you and your family fresh and tasty cookies to survive.

The main location of the film is a family-filled cul-de-sac surrounded by deep woods. One could say, "Isn't this where Don Dohler lives?" And you would be right. That's why it's cool; that's why it's a great location. This is the sort of amateur filmmaking that can't come back

to us again. It's lost. Enthusiasm definitely remains but this look and this feel is gone.

Is that a reason to have so much affection for *Fiend?* No. Not a good reason. There are enough things going on in this movie to keep you happy and those are the good reasons. The Fiend itself, the location, the music; all this can grab you. This stuff is good. *Fiend* lets itself down with the pace. A horror film needs a steady pace if it wants to build atmosphere and dread. This movie has dull spots. They're not painfully dull, but I wish they weren't there. During those dull moments, you can possibly focus on another element of the production. Like music or hairdos.

*Fiend* isn't one of the best. But it is one that I like. It's got some intelligence, some fun effects, some stylish moments and that ever-present Dohler verve that defies proper explanation. It's trying something different from the slasher films so prevalent at the time and that's a good thing. Not all horror films have to feature great looking people doing tremendous things. Sometimes you just need average folks going out there and kicking ass. Yes, this could have used more energy. But trust me. By the end of this one you'll still get Dohler all over your pants. (DB)

# FILMGORE (1983)

**Ken Dixon**

“Who freed that gorilla – Ape Lincoln?”

In the early 1960s, *Famous Monsters Of Filmland* magazine began to stake its claim by juxtaposing horror culture with the art of the horrendous pun. I didn’t experience it firsthand, but I’m sure it was great. Twenty years later, Wizard Video and producer Ken Dixon were midway through a profit-hungry trilogy of VHS compilation tapes. The first, *The Best Of Sex And Violence* (1981), had dirty jokes. *Zombiethon* (1986), the finale, was photographed by dirty old men. Both were completely entertaining. As for the intermediate?

“That’s Spec-Dracular!”

God help us. *Filmgore* was the brainchild of Ken Dixon (director), Elvira (master of ceremonies), and Forest J. Ackerman *(Famous Monsters* creator/confused scribe). Simply put, this is 120 minutes of digest-versioned horror films, cheap SOV Elvira inserts, and hundreds of shitty zingers. In 1983, the logic must have sounded good. With the debut of *Blood Feast,* horror films had changed. There were now breasts, entrails, and lesbo shower scenes, but no Bela Lugosi. So how do you smooth over that generational breach? Easy. Get Elvira to recite jokes and expired cultural references from the pen of a 67-year-old man while half of *The Driller Killer* fruitlessly unwinds.

Egyptian rhumba floats over eight minutes of clips, all of which will be repeated during the next two hours. *Blood Feast* (20 minutes): “It’s like a trip to Ghosta-Rica!” *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (15 minutes): “This one’s enough to give you daymares!” *The Driller Killer* (10 minutes): “The Lone Stranger writhes again!” *Drive-In Massacre* (5 minutes): “It’s an outdoor theater with wall-to-wall car-petting.” *The Astro-Zombies:* I don’t remember what she said here. *Carnival Of Blood* (6 minutes): “This picture is tomb much!” *Dr. Jekyll’s Dungeon Of Death* (8 minutes, too long): “Isn’t this the same doctor that Frances Farmer went to?” *Fiend* (8 DOHLER-IZED minutes): See Ape Lincoln. *Two Thousand Maniacs* (8 more

minutes); “Only thirty chopping days before Xmas!” And finally, *Snuff* (15 minutes, including the entire ending); “This belongs in the horror hall of flame!”

I had high hopes for *Filmgore,* as I do with any horror film compilation tape. The possibilities are endless. Unfortunately, those hopes were defeated. Aside from *Dr. Jekyll’s Dungeon Of Death,* every film included here is worth watching in its entirety, ad infinitum. Furthermore, the warmth of compilation tape nostalgia is extinguished by the cold, unforgiving hand of terrible comedy. What a pain in the Ackerman. (JZ)

# FINAL EXAM (1981)

**Jimmy Huston**

The characters of *Final Exam* are all my friends. Courtney, the nice girl. Lisa, the sexy gal. Wildman, the dumb jock. Brian, the frat guy with the cool hair. Radish, the nerdy guy who knows what’s going on. Gary, the guy with the shirt that reads “GARY.” Janet, the innocent but dumb girl. Thursday is *Final Exam* Friends Night in my house. I have cardboard cutouts of each of the characters stored in the garage. On Thursday nights, they come to life and I am the center of attention. Everyone laughs at my jokes. Lisa flirts coquettishly. Wildman and I roughhouse. We eat some dining hall food – mainly hot turkey sandwiches – to help rekindle college memories. Then we watch *Final Exam.*

The one stipulation of *Final Exam* Friends Night is that I stop the movie before any of my pals get killed. They don’t want to see themselves die. I don’t want to see it happen either. We get one hour into the movie and stop. *Final Exam* is no longer a horror film about an unknown man killing students on a North Carolina campus during finals week. I call that the “Horror Version” of the film and we do not talk about it. When we watch it, the film is a story about a charming group of kids living their lives and having a nice time.

The movie begins with an opening sequence showing two people being killed at a college. We don’t know them, though. So who cares if they die? We treat the strange man lurking around the film, who kills in the “Horror Version,” as someone who really likes our Final Girl, Courtney. He’s just very shy. As my friends watch with me, we

reminisce about their lives. At least, what we know of their lives from the movie.

Jimmy Huston's film looks like a standard slasher from the early 80s. Technically, it is. There is a half-empty college at the end of term. There is a shadowy man with a knife stalking our leading lady. There is a large group of characters who will be dead by the end. But, rather than focusing on gore and sex and killer backstories, it spends more time developing characters. We're all the better for it. His characters are not perfectly crafted but repeated viewings draw them out. Once you've come to terms with the fact that the film is not going to throw in a killing every ten minutes, you'll begin to understand why this movie is unique. It truly is the story of a group of young people on the cusp of adulthood, trying to figure out what they are going to do with themselves. A madman comes along and they die. And you don't want them to.

No one wanted to care about characters in an early 1980s slasher film. These films were places where people got killed. They were fun. I don't dispute that. I applaud *Final Exam* for taking a step that most films wouldn't have taken. Develop those characters. Make us care about them. Make me want to invite them all over to my house for *Final Exam* Friends Night. Brian has just pulled up in his Hot Wheels Ferrari. I've got to finish Lisa's salad. I put on Renaissance's first album for Radish. This will be the greatest night of my life. (DB)

# FLESHEATER (1988)

**Bill Hinzman**

It's Halloween. The cemetery zombie from the beginning of *Night Of The Living Dead* is unearthed in a beautiful wooded area. In fact, the zombie in *Flesheater* is played by Bill Hinzman, who played the cemetery zombie in the original *Night.* A group of party animals are attacked. The zombies spread outward and begin attacking trick or treaters, people partying in a barn and anyone who's alive. People that we expect to get killed are killed. Some people we expect to

survive are also killed. The gore is liberal. The boobs are large and in charge.

This is Bill Hinzman's baby all the way. He's the director, the co-writer and the co-editor. He's the cemetery zombie. Like *The Majorettes,* his direction is never spectacular. But the cameras and actors are always facing where they're supposed to. If it's in frame, it works. Bill wasn't up to anything but grossing people out. Where George Romero made his films with satirical intent or social commentary, Bill wads those intentions up and crams them out of sight. He's after the gore and the boob.

The makers of zombie movies can get lucky. The feeling of mounting death and devastation in zombie films as they roll on towards their generally downbeat endings can occur regardless of the filmmaking skills involved. For example, *Curse Of The Screaming Dead* has bad acting, subpar picture quality and bad sound. But as soon as the undead start tearing people apart and eating them, the film becomes effective. For a brief period of time anyway. *Flesheater* begins with a farmer uncovering the zombie. People are torn apart and night falls. The movie rolls on; the number of zombies increases. The feeling of apocalypse that many zombie films reach, even when they are low-scale, fills my brain.

There is a scene featuring the party animals in the woods where a really vague "rock" song plays. The women in the woods dance in front of their men, who stare up at them. One of the girls flashes her boobs at the height of the song's excitement. I never got invited to parties like this. I want to thank Bill Hinzman for placing me in that world for these brief moments. Two scenes later, one of the men is impaled on a pitchfork. One of the women has her guts eaten. Maybe I did get invited to parties like that. I just knew not to go. (DB)

# THE FOREST (1982)

**Donald M. Jones**

The year was 1983. A man named David Somerville sang, “People disappear, but where do they hide? In the darkside of THE FOREST. Wouldn’t you get lost? You’ll have to pay the cost. ‘Cause many have died. In the darkside of THE FOREST.” You’d better heed his warning.

A direct-to-video slasher with its own theme song seems pretty hard to beat. Plus, director Donald Jones’ exploitation lineage *(The Love Butcher; Schoolgirls In Chains)* suggests that, if nothing else, *The Forest* will feature some quality joyless rape in a pool or dungeon. So much anticipation! So much disappointment!

After a prologue kill scene, two unhappy couples argue about who’s tuff enuff to survive a camping trip alone. Battle of the sexes! Sharon and Teddi decide that they are scared of nothing. They say, “We’re gonna go camping!” And so, they’re off. Right before the ladies leave, Charlie and Steve decide to meet them at the campsite later that night (“Maybe it’ll be like old times, when we were happy . . . “). Let the counterfeit Blondie songs begin. Let the padding begin. Most importantly, let “The Darkside Of The Forest” begin. Lurking in a cave is Gary Kent. He’s a killer and also a cannibal. Gary is armed with a gas station attendant’s jumpsuit and a shiny Rambo knife. Charlie unknowingly eats his wife, Sharon, after Gary cooks her remains over a fire. The ghosts of Gary’s wife and kids attempt to scare the campers. We soon learn about Gary’s domestic woes, and why they have driven him to kill and eat human beings. Sniff, sniff. Even the bobcat sound effects can’t hold back their emotions.

I loved it when the screen went black every time something important happened. Excellent way to confound the audience’s senses! The soundtrack was highly appropriate – Bing Crosby and generic new wave are undoubtedly the best complements for cannibalism. It was also a good idea to keep the film virtually bloodless after the opening kill scene. Add endless scenes of Charlie and Steve wandering around the forest and endless scenes of Gary hanging out in his cave and it all becomes clear. David Somerville

was right. You do have to pay the cost. Especially when you're watching *The Forest.* (JZ)

# FRANKENSTEIN ISLAND (1981)

**Jerry Warren**

Check this out: Four adult men in a hot air balloon land on an island.

In 1981, the late Jerry Warren hadn't directed a film in fifteen years. After making my way through *Frankenstein Island,* both his comeback and swan song, it appears that he hadn't seen a film in fifteen years, either. The climate of horror cinema in the early 80s was drastically different from that of the late 60s, which was when Warren's last film, *The Wild World Of Batwoman,* was released. Slashers, boobs, and severed limbs were in. Mad scientists, ray guns, and stop-motion monster transformations were out. Warren was unaware. Essentially a remake of the director's own *Teenage Zombies* from 1959, *Frankenstein Island* is a film lost in time.

It also feels like it was created by an entire retirement community on the cusp of dementia.

Everyone is old. Everyone is pissed. Sometimes, they can't remember to wear pants. But goddamn it, they're going to *Frankenstein Island!*

When the hot air balloon lands, we meet unattractive Amazons, Sheila Frankenstein, Cameron Mitchell reciting Edgar Allan Poe, and a bunch of old guys wearing turtlenecks and ski caps. Sloppy Joes are eaten. Someone says "I'll fix that clown!" and breathtaking karate ensues. Inserts of John Carradine (on loan from *The Best Of Sex And Violence* or possibly *The Nesting),* mannequins modeled after heroin addicts, and psychedelic skulls interrupt without reason. There is, indeed, a Frankenstein monster. His general confusion seems more suited to bending over a toilet bowl and vomiting than stalking victims.

Point. Shoot. Zoom a little. Like every film Jerry Warren made before it, *Frankenstein Island* is a testament to the director's arrested development. Given the context, it's also his finest hour. As for the content? It could probably lay the groundwork for a global warning. Cryptic, hysterical, and pessimistic in tone, *Island* is what happens when a man hates the day-to-day rigors of living and no longer cares. Therefore, he has lost his mind. Anything goes. No one understands. Think *Runaway Nightmare* on an *Ozzie And Harriet* playing field. Then, think of a drunk man named "Jocko, "an eyepatch, and his cigarette-stained cackle. (JZ)

# THE FREEWAY MANIAC (1989)

**Paul Winters**

Have you ever body slammed someone and then thrown them off of a roof? I have. And I'll tell you what – *The Freeway Maniac* gets it right.

Horror-comedies from the late 1980s make my ass itch. *Blood Diner. Doom Asylum. I Was A Teenage Zombie.* They're intentional. They're cocky. But they're not funny. Regardless, I'm always conscious of the need to improve my sense of discriminating taste. Can a happy

medium exist between trash-horror and comedy? To find out, I suffer through *Phantom Of The Ritz.* I barely survive *Flesh Eating Mothers.* Then, *The Freeway Maniac* takes the wheel. And hauls ass.

*The Freeway Maniac* is a late-80s horror-comedy that cares. Positioned as a straight-ahead slasher that takes place on a movie set, this film follows a credo set forth by *Memorial Valley Massacre:* Comedy is not the means to an end. It is, however, a powerful instrument in the toolbox. Skeptical? If so, then how about when the F-way Maniac kills and eats a snake while clad in a blazer and tennis shorts? Or when he repeatedly gets in a big rig and tries to run people over? A Fat Fire Marshall pinch-hitting for our beloved Fat Sheriff? Cars blowing up for no reason? A funk rock song called "Nasty Kinky," which promises that all strippers are "NAS-TAAAY"? The Maniac's push-ups, tennis match freak-outs, and wolf-howls?

This film has no motives. It contains a minuscule amount of exploitation. Also, it may bore you every now and again. But that is the price we pay for seeking wisdom. *The Freeway Maniac* proves that horror and comedy can co-exist for 90 minutes without killing you. This is by no means a recommendation, but you might want to think about it.(JZ)

# FRIGHT HOUSE (1988)

**Len Anthony**

When I sit down to watch an unknown film on VHS, I anticipate a magical experience. Around the 45 minute mark, I started fast-forwarding *Fright House.* While watching the lines fly by, I fell asleep. The "chick-chack" of the ejecting tape woke me up.

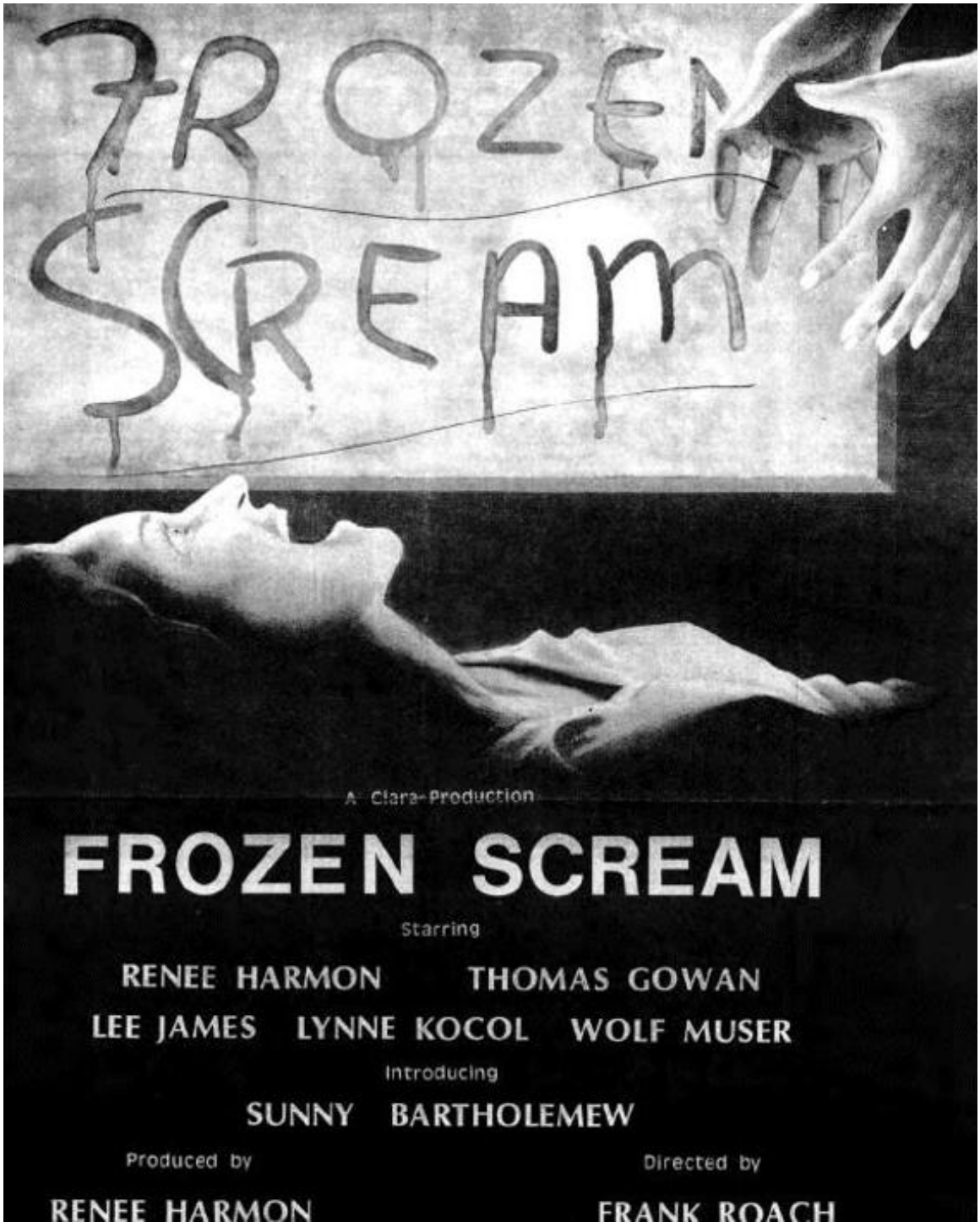
Abracadabra! Four separate title screens in a row. Hocus-pocus! Wet mullets that grow (and disappear) by themselves. Shazam! Mouths that continue having conversations after the soundtrack moves onto something new. *Fright House* is a two story anthology cobbled together from a few unfinished mid-80s projects courtesy producer-director Len Anthony. That sounds like an ambitious

undertaking. It is an ambitious undertaking. Unfortunately, ambition does not pay the bills when you're dealing with Al "Grampa Munster" Lewis. Hesitant? Well, the back of the box refers to a "superb soundtrack" from Bongiovi. Yes. Bongiovi. Not Bon Jovi.

Sleeping through *Fright House* is like witnessing a four hour block of film dailies without the benefit of context. The first mini-film, "Fright House", follows the exploits of a bambino detective, his pun-loving captain Al Lewis, a girl named Darlissa, and a satanic coven of nude women. Spray-on tanlines, hairy chests, and a stand-up comic should have sent me into hysterics. They did not. In "Abadon," a tarot card psychic (Duane Jones from *Night Of The Living Dead)* checks out an art school while students get nosebleeds and work in graphite. There's a bit of narration, more boobs, and stop-motion blobs. The wand continues to wave, but I can't go on.

Len Anthony may very well consider *Runaway Nightmare* to be a special climax in filmed entertainment. That would explain a lot. The empty, unproductive *Fright House* is more erratic than the similar *Terrifying Tales,* but just as dull. Amidst all the random footage (some SOV), runny gore, and flagrant nudity lies a method of filmmaking

that escapes rational thought. Unrelated inserts (most of them boobs) cut through conversations, while significant plot points evade our view. People talk about things, but I'm not sure why. This film lasts for 110 minutes. (JZ)



# FROZEN SCREAM (1981)

**Frank Roach**

If there is any justice in this world, Renee Harmon is now sitting on a cloud next to God.

Writer-producer-actor Harmon had a hand in some of the most remarkably defective American genre films of all time. From her association with director James Bryan *(Lady Streetfighter; Executioner Part 2)* to her late 80s dip into SOV *(Night Of Terror),* any film with her name on it is worth watching six or ten times before you die. A thick German accent prevents her from being completely understood, yet she typically casts herself as the lead. Her scripts seem to be assembled by a committee of dementia patients. She attacks her roles with the raw energy of a person waiting for a bus. *Frozen Scream* is Harmon's debut film, in which she served as actress, producer, and writer. It's also the inexplicable trash-horror film of your all-time greatest dreams.

Renee Harmon is a scientist. She attaches computer chips to people's necks with Velcro. Then, they become immortal zombies. The zombies have large mustaches and sleep standing up in someone's broom closet. Are these experiments for "love or immortality"? I have no idea, but everyone keeps asking that question. Once in a while, the zombies attack people with axes and knives, leading to some rubbery gore on par with something you'd see in *The Slayer* or *Nightmare.* Meanwhile, Renee invades the dreams of a woman named Ann. Ann's husband might be a zombie. Kevin is a cop. He loves Ann, but he is not her husband. Everyone goes to a warehouse party. They dance to a 1950s-styled rock band that sings "Jack Around the Shack" instead of "Rock Around The Clock." In a flashback on Halloween night, a priest asks Ann, "This thing about immortality – do you think that's Pagan?" A sluggish woman shows a nipple. A black-hooded executioner with a skull face appears in a window. Then, it all doesn't come together.

*Frozen Scream* had a script. There's a copy in the archives of the library of the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences. I've leafed through it. And yet, I still refuse to believe that a script existed when the film was shot. There's no story to speak of. There's no beginning, no middle, and no end. Deadpan narration serves as a connecting thread, but it connects to nothing. Scene selection and order were obviously chosen at random by someone who had never watched a movie all the way through. The editing follows suit. For example, a zombie chases Ann out of a house. Then, when she reaches the exterior, the zombie has disappeared. Ann walks around for a few seconds and looks at the sky.

No matter how many times you watch it, *Frozen Scream* makes very little sense. But not much in life ever does. That's the beauty of Renee Harmon's cinema. (JZ)

# FUNERAL HOME (1980)
# aka CRIES IN THE NIGHT

**William Fruet**

Somewhere in the third season of *What's Happening!!,* Dee let loose with one of her signature zingers: "Rerun, you've got so much velvet

in here, you could be an undertaker." *Funeral Home* could use a good undertaker joke. Actually, *Funeral Home* could use a lot of things.

Slashers can't go halfway. Cut corners will be amplified tenfold. *Curtains* made me aware of this problem. *Funeral Home* proves it. Directed by William Fruet *(Killer Party)* and shot in Toronto, the plot follows young Heather as she helps Grandma convert the family funeral home into a bed and breakfast for the summer. Grandma's schtick reveals the *Psycho* twist ending a full 80 minutes before it actually hits. Heather walks around the house a lot. Her boyfriend prefers refurbishing furniture to sex. A retarded handyman fails miserably as a red herring, but evokes the vocal spirit of Bobcat Goldthwait. Also, a cop steps in a pile of shit.

While *Funeral Home* works in some subtle creeps and makes excellent use of its small town scenery, the dull events, acting, and plot holes loom over everything else. Spaces are wide open, both literally and figuratively, so all we can see are the shortcomings. We're left with a PG-rated thriller that's nice to look at, but lacks definition. "This is a very small town and a lot of very bored people live here." I appreciate that honesty. (JZ)

# GALAXY INVADER (1985)

**Don Dohler**

In a *New Yorker* article titled "The UFO Menace," Woody Allen posed a question that heightened the pulse of the American public.

"Is anything out there? And if so, do they have ray guns?"

Baltimore responds with a resounding "Yes."

*Galaxy Invader* is not an Atari rarity. Rather, it's a Don Dohler rarity. This is the touching story of an alien, his ray gun, and a Jimmy Stewart impersonator. Baltimore Renaissance man Don Dohler charmed our late-night pants off with *The Alien Factor* in 1978. He

engaged our curiosity and set our sleeping patterns with *Fiend* in 1980. He made the trash-gore Olympics with *Night-beast* in 1982. In 1985, the lo-fi maestro completed *Galaxy Invader,* a throwback to 1978's PG-level high jinks, but with an added level of "development." It's less about the alien and more about the people. Granted, those people are still portrayed by actors who were probably found at a laundromat. But I can't scoff at good intentions.

Following the pattern of every Don Dohler film, an alien crashes somewhere in Baltimore. He looks like Skeletor as interpreted by Sid & Marty Krofft and has a glowing orb belt buckle. After killing a random couple, our story shifts from the alien to a family of redneck slobs. An argument during breakfast leads a dad to chase his daughter through the woods with a shotgun.

Much shooting ensues. Dad meets the alien. He wants that orb belt buckle! It'll bring big bucks! Can the family stop Dad? Can a college professor and his ex-student save the Space Man? Did everyone in the movie purchase their gigantic eyeglasses in the same thrift store?

Uneventful, but semi-entertaining. That sums it up. While the somber mood and deeper themes bode well for *Galaxy Invader,* the vacant second half drowns everything out. Dohler is an expert at analog synth placement, rapid edits, resourceful homemade effects, and hysterical casting decisions. But this time around, variation is in short

supply. It all wears thin by the time a dummy made out of pipe cleaners falls off of a cliff. (JZ)

# THE GAME (1984)
# aka THE COLD

### Bill Rebane

My dog and I watched *The Game* on a warm Saturday afternoon. I generally enjoy the films of director Bill Rebane so I was looking forward to it. After we watched the movie, I was unsure how my dog felt. But I enjoyed the film. It had exactly what I needed to write a review. On Monday, I sat down to write. I couldn't remember a damn thing about the movie.

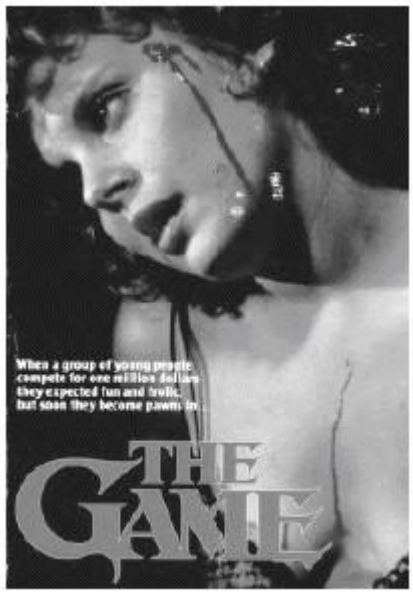
I've been Rebaned!

*The Game* is about three millionaires who invite a group of swinging folks to a lovely lodge in Wisconsin to play The Game. The contestants have to survive everything that the millionaires throw at them, including spiders, rats, and library music from other Rebane films. The survivor wins a million dollars. A narrator explains all of this at the beginning of the movie. This is odd because the millionaires explain it again a few minutes later. That's only the first of many odd moments.

The whole film is disconnected. People argue. Other people laugh at the people who argue. A demon head bursts through a woman's bed and spits yellow bile at her. A man is slowly followed by a white mist through lodge hallways. Another man is hit with a blast of cold wind while standing in front of his bathroom door. A nude woman yells, "You can't come in here! I'm nude!" Then, The Game ends and there is a twist. This is followed by another twist. The narrator returns and mentions that the second twist doesn't make sense. He's right. Personally, I would say that the final twist makes less sense than the second one unless the viewer is also meant to be playing The Game. But, at that moment, I was waving some sort of stick that

makes bird noises in front of my dog. I'm pretty sure I wasn't playing The Game. Although my dog may have been.

I kept thinking that I was watching a *Monster A Go-Go-type* concoction. Bill Rebane started shooting that film but didn't finish it. H.G. Lewis shot extra scenes to get it to feature length, specifically a scene with a woman's car breaking down.


When a group of young people
compete for one million dollars
they expected fun and frolic,
but soon they become pawns in
THE
GAME

Not everything in the competed film was a part of Rebane's original. But, everyone in *The Game* interacts with everyone else and it all seems to be set at the same location. So I think I'm wrong. The feeling still nags me. On more than one occasion, there will be a scene that seems to be leading the film somewhere and then it will jump to another scene that seems to be from a different world. For example, the millionaires discuss The Game and the contestants at the start. Then we cut to random people dancing. Then we see the millionaires explaining The Game to the dancers, who are the contestants. But it's presented in a manner that makes me think someone here was high or unable to take the scenes that were shot and make them cohesive. It's like some part of the cinematic glue was missing from the final product.

While The Game is being played, there is one element that sticks out over all others. That's The Cold, the white mist that follows people in hallways. It's just dry ice floating along the floor. But what exactly does The Cold represent in the film itself? Its presence is never fully explained. My thought is that it is a variation of the more colorful alien mist from Rebane's earlier film *Invasion From Inner Earth.* In that film, random clouds of mist appear. They envelop people. The people vanish. The mist comes from the center of the earth. Maybe The Cold is a supernatural offshoot of that. I've already spent one full hour debating with myself about its provenance. If that's not being Rebaned, I don't know what is. (DB)

# GATES OF HELL 2: DEAD AWAKENING (1988)
# aka THROUGH THE FIRE

**G.D. Marcum**

Upon reaching the end of this film, you might notice that it has nothing to do with Lucio Fulci's *The Gates of Hell.* It's missing the excessive gore and the dreamy structure. It's missing the big horror set pieces, such as the rain of maggots. If the filmmakers truly intended this to be a sequel to Fulci's film, then I will eat the collected hats of the readers of this book.

Sandra is looking for her missing sister, Marilyn. She teams up with Nick, a cop, and begins investigating a series of related disappearances. Sandra discovers that her sister was a Destroyer, sent by Yahweh to kill anyone worshipping the evil spirit Moloch. The spirit's followers killed Marilyn and now they're after Sandra and Nick. It all culminates with a zombie vs. grenade free-for-all in the drab hallways of a deserted building.

The concept behind the film is ambitious. An ancient demon is being called forth by men and women for power and money. In one scene, it is implied that Moloch is Satan himself. There is a strange cadre of Destroyers who are hunting these people down. Marilyn has big hair

and drives a cool sports car. I imagine the Destroyers in the 1920s dressed like flappers and drove Model A's. The film has no shortage of inspired thought behind it.

The majority of the film, however, is Sandra and Nick investigating this weird cult of Moloch. The investigation is peppered with random demon attacks but all of it feels a little muddled. We don't really find out who all of the murdered people are. When Sandra and Nick interview friends and relatives of the attacked, it never really goes anywhere. We get a pentagram here and a medallion there.

It's only when they meet up with an occult expert that we learn what's going on. I was wondering what the rest of the film would do now because the expert literally tells them the entire plot. The whole film has been a build-up to the final confrontation in the abandoned building but the build-up doesn't raise the bar of suspense. We should be hoping for the epic appearance of Moloch or a great battle or something. Instead, Sandra wanders some hallways, shoots some zombies and blows up the bad guy.

The ambition of the actual production seems at odds with the ambition of the story. It's an epic of Good vs. Evil. The film itself is just two good looking people going from location to location. Sometimes they shoot people. Sometimes men with beards talk to them excitedly. It never justifies all the time it spends setting itself up. *Gates Of Hell 2* feels like the failed pilot for a show involving Sandra and Nick traveling the world hunting down the forces of Moloch. The filmmakers didn't want to give away too much in the opening installment. The viewer is left unsatisfied. (DB)

# GHOST DANCE (1980)

**Peter F. Buffa**

A vengeful Native American with at least three names turns into a dog and psychically forces women to stare at windows. Oh shit! That sounds super boring! And it is.

*Ghost Dance* is a shot-in-Arizona, direct-to-video obscurity from one-time director Pete Buffa. It's also very, very boring. When anthropology professor Kay Foster removes her dork glasses, things do not get sexy as they do in *The Beach Girls.* Instead of naked people getting high from a bonfire made out of pot, Kay decides to explore an ancient Indian burial ground. Soon after, I decided to explore the idea of watching *Scalps* again. *Scalps* is the most dire Native American slasher of all time. I'd happily sit through Chabrol's *Les Cousins* three times in a row before braving *Scalps* just once more. What I mean to say is that *Ghost Dance* should be kept away from the general vicinity of humanity.

When a guy steals an old medicine bag on the site of Kay's dig, he unleashes the spirit of Wouoka. Wouoka possesses a tall Indian man in a cave. You can tell that the possession is happening because everything goes duotone. From there, random people (a nagging wife, a couple doing it in a museum) die at the hands of the Indian. There's also a mummy autopsy. Kay talks a lot about "the Ghost Dance" religion and everyone forgets about the murders. For the entire runtime, I had no idea what was going on. This was partly due to the extremely dark photography, but mostly due to the fact that

nothing was going on. I fell asleep and woke up. Kay was holding a knife. She still looked like Angela from *Who's The Boss?*

*Ghost Dance* features some slight gore, serviceable acting, and mounds of talk, mostly referring to details that the audience doesn't know (or care) about. The characters throb with anti-charisma and there's nothing to laugh at. When people die, we hear sound effects like the high-pitched backing vocals from T. Rex's "The Slider." During each kill scene, I sang that song to myself. The respite was beautiful. (JZ)

# GHOST STORIES: GRAVEYARD THRILLER (1986)

**Lynn Silver**

What were these people thinking?

Anthology films follow a no-brainer template: Introduction. Story. Repeat. Repeat. Fin. It's pretty difficult to screw that up, even if you're dealing with David L. Hewitt's *Gallery Of Horrors.* But someone screwed this one up.

The camera swoops over a stuffed owl while a shabby Halloween soundtrack plays. Welcome to the Tuesday Hill Boneyard! Our host is clad in a white suit in the style of Colonel Sanders. After talking for a few minutes, he introduces the first story. I kept waiting for a cheap dissolve that would hopefully segue into a real movie – one with sets, actors, and props interacting with each other. Instead, we get another man. This man talks into the camera and starts telling a story. Minutes pass. I begin to realize that instead of SHOWING us this story, he's just going to TELL us. The host returns. I fast forward. A woman appears. She begins to talk. I fast forward again. I think about eating ice cream later. The host returns again. This goes on for 60 minutes. Sixty minutes of concentrated torture.

*Ghost Stories: Graveyard Thriller* is a SOV anthology film that forgets to anthologize. Instead of a host introducing five segments,

we have a host that introduces four people who ACT OUT THE STORIES ON THEIR OWN IN FRONT OF THE CAMERA. There are no actual productions of the stories. None at all. Rather, there are ex-Drama Club members relaying stories that weren't up to snuff for *Friday The 13th: The Series.* They mug to the camera as if Mort Guffman was in the audience. They stare at an occasional prop. They dodge the fog machine haze. Poorly.

I can sympathize with anyone trying to fulfill a dream. I'm sure the creative minds behind *Ghost Stories* had nothing but the best intentions. Still, the rationale behind this tape boggles the mind. The back of the box even goes so far as to rip-off *The Last House On The Left* with: "Keep repeating, it's only a VIDEO . . . it's only a VIDEO . . . it's only a VIDEO . . . "Maybe, if I think hard enough, I can pretend that none of it happened. (JZ)

# GHOSTHOUSE (1988)

**Humphrey Humbert aka Umberto Lenzi**

Umberto Lenzi's *Ghosthouse* has a preoccupation with "computers" and "ham radio technology", which I appreciate. It also has Duran Duran references, which I appreciate. Also, someone says, "You wanna mind your own beeswax?," and I appreciate that too. Why?

In fifth grade, a girl name Chrissy stole a cassette of Duran Duran's "Seven And The Ragged Tiger" out of my cubbyhole. My friend saw her do it. I liked Chrissy. We played Nintendo together once. So, I confronted her. "Beeswax" was one of the words she used in her reply. "A-hole" was another. In fact, she might have said, "You wanna mind your own beeswax, a-hole?" If Umberto Lenzi were in this room right now, I'd tell him about that. I would also punch him in the dick.

A couple of senior citizens are killed in a farmhouse. A little girl and a clown doll watch. Twenty years later, ass-head Paul and his possibly European girlfriend, Martha, discuss Kelly LeBrock and Simon LeBon over their ham radio. Then, the radio emits noises that sound like a grown man imitating Danny's "redrum" voice from *The Shining.*

Paul uses his computer to trace the origin of the sounds. The little girl, the clown doll, and the farmhouse return. A Winnebago full of young people arrives. They all have mullets. Even the ladies! In a wash of *Cosby Show* theme song outtakes, Commodore 64 computer noises, and exploding glass objects, everyone is killed by a caretaker. Someone takes a milk bath.

Mulleted heads separated from shoulders. Supernatural ham radios. A CLOWN DOLL! *Ghosthouse* should have been a great time, but flimsy character motivations, limp direction, and an overly long runtime keep it from getting there. Plus, the promise of a killer clown doll turned out to be a broken one – the doll just gets flung over an actress' shoulder in one scene. It never comes to life. Some of the gore effects would have made me flinch if the photography wasn't pitch-black. Also, I couldn't stop thinking about how I'd like to hear "Reflex" again. (JZ)

# GHOSTKEEPER (1981)

**Jim Makichuk**

When I discover a trash-horror film with a very small cast, a large estate, and a lot of snow, my desires are not unrealistic. I simply want a cheap rip-off of *The Shining.* But instead of Jack Nicholson, I prefer a killer who is a fat Eskimo. Perhaps, this guy could store his victims, who are decapitated while riding on snowmobiles, in an igloo. Then he could have LSD-styled flashbacks that explain his tragic back story, which involves some kind of sex. That's not what I got from *Ghostkeeper.* But what I did get wasn't enough to appease me.

Chrissie, Jen, and Marty are celebrating the New Year by riding around on snowmobiles in the middle of nowhere. The woodlands are marvelous. The soundtrack's cellos are huge. Then, there is a snowmobile accident. Looking for help, our heroes stumble upon Deer Lodge. Ignoring an old geezer's warning of the place, Marty says, "Since when do we play by the rules?" The snowmobilers proceed to inspect the Deer Lodge. It appears to be abandoned.

Exploration turns to lusty small talk. Lusty small talk turns to relationship problems. Marty stumbles onto a secret. Deer Lodge is not so abandoned after all.

*Ghostkeeper* was filmed in desolate Alberta, Canada. That's the movie's greatest asset. Long stretches of silence, massive snowy landscapes, and a lack of ties to civilization act as attractors. From the minute the movie starts, it's easy to get lost in the atmosphere. The filmmakers use this to their advantage. Instead of emphasizing blood and boobs, they go after what's right in front of our faces. And it works. Sudden surprises and a deep sense of melancholy all stem from the ambience.

Yet, the carelessness overpowers the atmosphere. That's what makes the movie disappointing. Lots of walking around and talking. Pitch-black photography during moments of action. And, most grating of all, an introduction states, "In the Indian legends of North America, there exists a creature called Wendigo . . . a ghost who lives on human flesh!," but we never see the monster. There's no mention of it. Instead, we get an igloo-dwelling fat guy who looks like Buddy from *Slaughterhouse.* This absentmind-edness makes the movie feel as if the filmmakers had free reign for a weekend and enacted every idea as soon as possible. Sometimes, this type of urgency leads to iconic trash like *Long Island Cannibal Massacre.* Sometimes it doesn't.

Normally, unintentional gaps in competence would only enhance the experience. But this isn't *Iced. Ghostkeeper* had an opportunity to rise above the confines of slasher-trash and achieve greatness. Unfortunately, boundaries were never set. The lack of consistency equals both good fortune and calamity, but burdens us with the responsibility of plowing through it all. (JZ)

# GHOUL SCHOOL (1989)

**Timothy O'Rawe**

Fuckity goddamn sonuvabitch shithead fuck. Sorry, but that line had to go somewhere.

*Ghoul School* is a one-off, tongue-in-cheek gorefest with more cursing per minute than any other film I've ever seen. It was also shot in New Jersey. Fueled on brain cells that were fried long ago, the brief movie sets the high bar for *Splatter University,* but only clears the one for *I Was A Teenage Zombie.* If you haven't been blessed by the special kind of idiocy offered in those pubescent anti-master-works, there's an easier way to understand. *Ghoul School* belongs to the stoner kids. Always has, always will. Fifteen years on, they still score the best weed, live with their parents, bag groceries, and get laid a lot. Only now, they're 39.

One drab day, two thugs accost an enormous school janitor (who may be drunk or constipated – it's hard to tell), and unleash some kind of water contaminant into the blackboard jungle. The swim team transforms into blue-skinned ghouls, who proceed to chow down on everyone. Mucho hashbrowns and wet-chicken-guts gore follows. Meanwhile, a band called "Blood Sucking Ghouls" rehearses in the auditorium, two nerds watch a bootleg horror VHS in the A/V room, and the basketball team practices. There are many instances of white sweatpants and an even greater number of unsuccessful hairstyles. Jackie "The Joke Man" Martling (oy!) tells jokes to Joe Franklin (double oy!) and a guy gets an axe to the crotch.

"Blade, you know I think you're the best goddamned lead singer in New York." This may be true. But that's where the gratification ends. Despite the hilarious band antics and genuine enthusiasm that seeps from every frame, *Ghoul School* wheezes and eventually spurts out. Just like a stoner kid running the mile. There's a lot of humorous padding. There's a lot of gross violence. Unfortunately, the mental incapacity (awful jokes, crudeness, and onscreen hamming) squashes all. For no-budget junk, *Ghoul School* is technically competent and not entirely unlikeable. Too bad it's not much fun to actually sit through. (JZ)

# GIRLS NITE OUT (1984)

**Robert Deubel**

If this is college, I hereby revoke my degree.

Somewhere between the sexual melancholy of *The Last American Virgin* and the juicy ineptitude of *The Last Slumber Party* lies *Girls Nite Out.* Filmed in New Jersey and New York City by director Robert Deubel (who never helmed another film) and distributed by Sam Sherman's Independent-International, this film flies the reject pennant high. Stand, salute, and revel in the glory. Discovering a slasher as bizarre as this one is like receiving a letter from your credit card company that says, "Hey, we goofed up. You actually don't have to pay us anymore because you're the best.

Plus, here’s a check for 500K so you can buy a house and be free of your upstairs neighbor’s asshole dog.”

We’re at a small Midwestern college on the night of a sorority scavenger hunt. Characters come and go, but one thing’s for sure: everyone is either high, drunk, retarded, or soon will be. Sinister rumors about Dickie Cavanaugh, a crazed student who lost his mind over a girl, abound. Basketball players hug each other in their underwear while sipping Jack Daniels and playing with bow and arrow sets. Nerds dance for their lives. English majors prepare for a

no-win career in stand-up comedy. Soon enough, a killer dons the school's mascot outfit, which is a puffy bear suit. He begins slicing off the scavenger hunters with a homemade claw. He yells, "Bitch! Whore! Slut!" Actor Hal Holbrook, surely an inspiration for Joe Flaherty on *Freaks And Geeks* fifteen years later, sums it up nicely in his role as a security guard: "I had a daughter like that once. You know where she is now? SHE'S DEAD!"

Filled with caricatures and late 1960s bubblegum (s)hits, *Girls Nite Out* is the vignette-styled slasher that Robert Altman never made. Everything overlaps. Tangents emerge. Tons of righteous scumbags talk dirty, sleep with anything wearing pants, and treat each other poorly. The script (four writers strong) bounces all over the place, never explaining any one event thoroughly enough to draw sensible conclusions. So, we're left to pick up the pieces on our own. Just think of the possibilities! Did the killer get the bear suit dry-cleaned after the messy twist ending? Was cocaine the culprit behind the jaw-dropping group photo scene? Do farts really serve as an aphrodisiac for ladies? In my version of the movie – yes, yes, and yes. (JZ)

# GOREMET ZOMBIE CHEF FROM HELL (1986)

**Don Swan**

In a haze of pot smoke and Doritos, a group of tenth-grade guyz had a revelation.

"Hey, I really like those slasher movies."

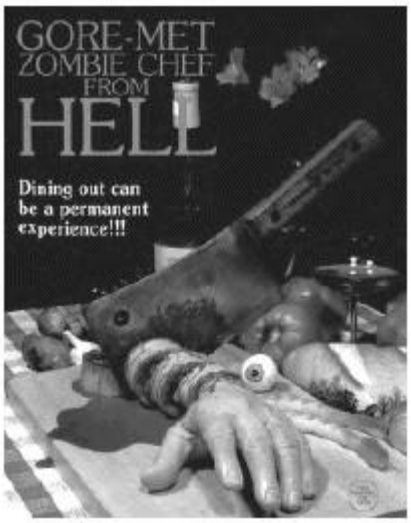
"You know what? I really like those AND Dungeons & Dragons."

"What if we borrowed your dad's Super 8 camera and made our own movie? It would be like a funny version of Dungeons & Dragons, like if it was happening for real but there would also be a killer!"

"Yeah, yeah, and with TIIIIIITS!"

*Goremet Zombie Chef From Hell* was born. Like *Boardinghouse,* this is a fine example of cinema so ridiculous and unsightly that it could have only been birthed in the 1980s. Shot on Super 8 and edited on video, *Goremet* feels like a boring in-joke that was somehow converted into a full-length film. Is that supposed to be a foot? It looks like a hot dog. Why is someone eating it? Is that even funny?

The year is 1386. “The Ancient Order” is a group of forty-something wizards. They curse a guy named Gosa. This is easy to remember because Gosa is the only character with a name. Cut to 1986. Gosa stares into the camera and talks. He runs a sleazy operation called “Gosa’s Deli & Beach Club,” but it’s really a front for chopping people’s feet off and eating them. That’s the basic set-up. For the first 40 minutes, rubbery gore flies all over the place while rip offs of ELO songs repeat endlessly. Gosa enjoys an extended dance sequence with some topless women. Padding involves small talk, a musical performance by men in jogging shorts, and gratuitous cocktail mixing. Gosa says, “Don’t chastise me!” Then, he has a showdown with one of the Ancient Order guys in a park. This is the best part of the movie. There are hooded sweatshirts, white high-tops, and invisible force fields that the actors sometimes forget about. After that, Gosa begins to die from malnourishment. This leads to a final showdown with a high priestess who has a giant perm. This movie is only 65 minutes long.



*Goremet* sounds amazing, but it doesn't always work. That's mostly due to the off-putting techniques on display – extended shots of people hanging out in a static void aren't exactly inviting. *Goremet* can't figure out what's what. When you're dealing with a budget this low and a concept this "ambitious," there needs to be some kind of focal point to reign in the madness. There isn't one. Still, I did laugh a lot. Especially when a cop was decapitated and the stand-in mannequin looked like Phyllis Diller. (JZ)

# GORGON VIDEO MAGAZINE (1989)

**Stuart S. Shapiro**

A back cover blurb warns: "NOT FOR BEACH BOY FANS!" How will that affect me? I am a fan of The Beach Boy. And also of The Kink and The Beatle. Fifteen minutes later, A KNB EFX Guy says:

"If the ratings board people all go to hell, they should be forced to watch *Freddy's Nightmares* forever! Ha ha! OH YEAH!"

I guess I just wasn't made for these times.

The back cover was correct. Therefore, this tape is not for me. But if you're twelve and into "Blizzard Of Oz" t-shirts, listening to people talk about foam latex, catch phrases such as "Stay twisted!," and the band GWAR, then *Gorgon Video Magazine* is most certainly for you. Or, it was for you back in 1989.

*Gorgon Video Magazine* is the first (and last) of a proposed series of bi-monthly horror compilations from Gorgon/MPI Home Video. It's

kind of like watching *Splatter: Architects Of Fear* and a bunch of Dokken videos all in one sitting . . . only real!! As expected, the net result of this 75 minute mishmash is one part hilarity, one part stagnation, one part junior high, and one part MIDI keyboard version of Nirvana's "Blew."

Host Michael Berryman (The *Hills Have Eyes)* appears to be auditioning for *American Gladiators* while these things happen:

- Wes Craven's *Shocker* is "probably going to be better than *Last House On The Left.*

- Linnea Quigley debuts clips from *Linnea Quigley's Horror Workout* while talking about something.

- A young(er) Lloyd Kaufman, clad in blue sweat pants, leads a tour of the Troma building.

- Rick Sullivan of *The Gore Gazette* presents four "reviews" that are actually just a bunch of clips from *Cameron's Closet, Henry: Portrait Of A Serial Killer, Vicious,* and *Bad Taste.*

- Digest versions of *A Bucket Of Blood* and *Attack Of The Giant Leeches.*

- GWAR performs, then "GWAR Slaves" are interviewed, which may be the most embarrassing two minutes of fandom ever caught on video.

- Trailers for *Death Spa, Girlfriend From Hell,* and *Judgement Day.* There was also some live performance art. From France. (JZ)

# GRAVEROBBERS (1988)
# aka DEAD MATE

**Straw Weisman**

There's nothing more amusing than a naked dead girl in a morgue. Especially when a guy wearing rubber gloves gropes her boobs and says, "It's safe sex now, because we can't get AIDS from dead people."

Am I right or am I right?

*Graverobbers* is a necrophilia horror-comedy from producer/ second-generation-Andy-Milligan-nemesis Lew Mishkin. Sure, it's got some raunch. Naturally, there's a bit of gore. But when you get right down to it, the dirt-cheap *Graverobbers* isn't really a horror movie. Or a comedy. It's more of a cinematic experiment. As in: "Hey, do you think we can get people to spend money on something that does not encourage consciousness, as long as it's vaguely exploitive?"

Sadly, I can confirm that the answer is yes.

Far, far, removed from the disturbing 1970s necro-drippings of *Love Me Deadly,* the drudging *Graverobbers* has long stretches of nothing, confusing comedic dialogue, and a zombie on a motorcycle. It's a wreck. And it goes like this: Waitress Nora accepts a spur-of-the-moment marriage proposal from a complete stranger. As it turns out, her new hubby is a mortician in the town of Newbury, where people like to do it with dead bodies. Nora, probably stoned, visits a library, police station, and church. She talks to people. She sleeps. Calypso hard rock accompanies her on this journey. Suddenly, things pick up at 80 minutes.

AIDS jokes! So good! Aside from a couple of almost-interesting moments (a zombie says "Oh shit!" and there's a theme song with rapping in it), *Graverobbers* balances horror and comedy with both eyes closed and its shoelaces tied together. There's no charm and very little drive. Pair it with Andy Milligan's *Surgikill* for maximum laffs at your next suicide party. (JZ)

# THE HACKERS (1988)

**John Duncan**

While perusing the Yellow Pages for roof repairs, the name “A.J. Hacker & Sons” might stand out. Or, it might not. Prepare to be unfazed.

Filmed in Croswell and Lexington, Michigan in 1987, *The Hackers* joins *Streets Of Death* as a nearly impossible to find SOV. It was never distributed outside of the Midwest and limited to three thousand copies. No trace of the original VHS can be found anywhere. Its rarity might be the only notable aspect of this film. *The Hackers* lacks the extreme gore of *Splatter: Architects Of Fear,* the too-good-to-be-true morons of *Blood Lake,* and the regional flair of *Zombies Invade Pittsburg.* Simply put, it's a typical zero budget late 80s slasher that just happens to be shot-on-video. One of the killers does piss his pants, though.

A.J. Hacker & Sons have a good thing going. A.J. (old, bitchy) and his two sons (one in a tinfoil mask, one with no neck) live in a grayscale camouflage truck. They drive around and fix things for suburbanites while randomly killing people. A woman named Marcie house-sits for a friend. Marcie's clothes have a lot of static cling and she likes to jog. When A.J. and company arrive, Marcie says, "You're really startin' to tee me off!" The boys eventually get around to stalking her, but not before scenes of fishing, bar crawling, and father-son bonding grind us down. And yes, the "Was it all a dream?" ending is put to terrible use.

The Hackers properly utilizes Midwest accents, a tone-deaf soundtrack (think Cyndi Lauper jamming with Iggy Pop in a K-Mart parking lot while your mom sings along), and a fat cop reading lines from his desk. Despite all of this good stuff (and some solid photography), the slightly snarky film is never outrageous enough to make an impact. The stretches of nothingness do little to help. Still, it's clear that director John Duncan and his family were sincere in their attempts at producing a backwoods slasher. They did a serviceable job, but unfortunately, the personality went missing. (JZ)

# HALLOWEEN NIGHT (1988)
# aka HACK-O-LANTERN

**Jag Mundhra**

Tommy loses himself in the magic of a Walkman. He closes his eyes and whispers, “I can’t hear nuthin’ anymore.” A video-length rock ’n’ roll fantasy begins. The band is D.C. La Croix. The song is “Devil’s Son.” D.C. La Croix pouts their lips. They wear bicycle shorts. One of the guitars is shaped like an ax. Laser beams turn cymbals into shrunken heads.

Did you get that?

LASER BEAMS TURN CYMBALS INTO SHRUNKEN HEADS.

That is reason enough to watch *Halloween Night* at least twice.

*Halloween Night* aka *Hack-O-Lantern* loosely organizes itself around three siblings, a satanic grandpa’s “Halloween voodoo,” and a steady stream of gold-plated bullshit. No plot. No rules. No need for either. Also, the gun-toting bimbo on the back cover does not appear in the film. But I think her sister does.

After we get D.C. La Croix’d, a Halloween party begins. There is sex in a graveyard and weightlifting in a basement. Some full frontal stripping. A satanic killer in a rubber mask brands someone’s ass with a pentagram. Outside of the party, a stand-up comic works the crowd. He bends over, looks between his legs, and says, “I’m really a conservative girl!” Then he says, “Have you ever been in the wrong place at the right time? Lemme tell ya!” Then, he does an impression of a turkey. This man is not comedic. I do not like him. I want to pull

his orange sweatshirt over his head and rub dog poop on his shoes. After this, there is a performance from a different metal band called The Mercenaries. This is followed by another performance from The Mercenaries.

*Halloween Night* was shot in dingy 16mm somewhere in Los Angeles and released straight to video. It's the Halloween-themed trash film that destroys me, in a good way, more than any other. Unlike *Trick Or Treats* or *Hollow Gate,* there's little room for improvement. It rarely drags, and I never feel like I should be organizing my bookshelf instead of watching the movie. In addition to the bottomless pit of insane situations, this movie has the advantage of being created by filmmakers who couldn't have cared less. Arbitrary dubbing that is never dubbed correctly. A murder-crazed grandpa who mimics Charles Nelson Reilly. Ridiculously lazy Halloween costumes. But perhaps this says it all: A credit for Unit Production Manager simply reads "Dude." (JZ)

# HARD ROCK NIGHTMARE (1988)

**Dominick Brascia**

The Bad Boys, hard rockers extraordinaire, head off to a cabin in the woods to rehearse their rock. They bring their sound guy and some lady friends along. The cabin belongs to Jim, the singer, who is a bit troubled. When Jim was a boy, his grandfather would scare him with stories. The old man said that he was a vampire who worshipped Satan. So, the impressionable Jim drove a stake through the heart of Grandpa and killed him. When the Bad Boys arrive at Jim's cabin, the slaughter begins. A werewolf is on the loose. What do the fellows who brought us *Evil Laugh* have up their sleeves this time?

Yes, I know. This does sound like *Rock 'n' Roll Nightmare.* But, it's the toned-down version. *Hard Rock Nightmare* is truly "hard rock" where *Rock 'n' Roll Nightmare* is a full-on 80s metal attack. *Hard Rock* is for the kid who loved Van Halen but couldn't handle Metallica. *Rock 'n' Roll Nightmare* has a little bit more of everything you want, except for the blood. The hair is bigger. The music is

louder. The monsters are crazier. The gals are nuder. The pecs on the hero are more prominent. *Hard Rock* is calmer on all fronts. The members of the band and their girlfriends act more or less like normal people. The music isn't as loud. We are lower on the hair. The monster is a decent werewolf. But, the menagerie of demons in *Rock 'n' Roll Nightmare* – especially Satan – are more memorable.

I enjoyed most of this movie. It has slight touches of parody but they're less prominent than in *Evil Laugh.* There is a reference to the music of *Friday The 13th* that is a nice touch. But the film doesn't have anything like the character of Barney. He was the self-aware character in *Evil Laugh* who knew what to do in a horror film because he'd seen so many of them. *Hard Rock* spends time developing the characters and their relationships. There is a scene where groupie Tina finally sleeps with the member of the band she's been after for months. It turns out the band member is a lousy lay. Tina laughs at him. But it's not done in a "What a bitch!" manner. Tina seems very surprised that he's not better at sex. He gets defensive. Scenes like this don't normally appear in horror films of the 80s. More clichéd and more obvious characters were the norm. The way the characters in *Hard Rock* responded to a genuine "moment" felt real to me. The last half hour of the film has a long dream sequence involving the guys dressed like girls and vice versa. That seemed like filler. After that, we get the final battle with the werewolf.

*Hard Rock Nightmare* is a fine hard rock slasher that also has a werewolf in it. You'll sit down. You'll sing along. You'll smile. There's a good scare or two. It's a tasty stew. Although, like stew, there might be something hiding in there that brings down the overall enjoyment and makes you spit into a napkin. Regardless, any film that closes with the line "Fuck You, Uncle Gary!" is worth a viewing. (DB)

# HAUNTEDWEEN (1991)

**Doug Robertson**

Don't love *Hauntedween* for the title alone. Love it for the integrity.

This film positions its most unattractive assets – the annoying people and the terrible comedy – at the forefront. It's a bold move. And yet, it's one that pays off. Shot on tape around Bowling

Green, Kentucky, then filtered to film for home video release, *Hauntedween* will entertain you with its sincere clumsiness. How do I know? Simple. Little Richard impressions, a Danzig-meets-Morrissey theme song, and "Foot Locker SLAM FEST!" t-shirts couple perfectly with a gore-filled haunted house on Halloween night.

Halloween, 1970. Mullets. Animal print sweaters. Tight-rolled jeans. Little Eddie Burber isn't old enough to work in his family's spookhouse. Instead, he lures a young girl to a secret room within the walls, impales her on a spike, then decapitates her. Momma says, "We got to go, Eddie!"

Twenty years later. Beer bongs. Hawaiian swim trunks. Rejected Jackie Mason stand-up routines. The Sigma Pi frat is in dire need of funds to renew their charter. Head honcho Kurt may be losing his girlfriend, Mel. Solutions: Sunbathe. Throw a fundraiser party. Throw another fundraiser party.

Halloween night. Momma's dead. Eddie returns! After the keys to the Burber spookhouse end up with the Sigma Pis, the bros decide to re-open the "House Of Horrors" for yet another fundraiser. Eddie traps 'em, sets 'em up in spookhouse scenes, and kills 'em. Customers eat up the gore.

Roughly 45 minutes of this film will slap you into unconsciousness, if only by sheer annoyance alone. Plot points repeat. Boring people talk about nothing. Boring people talk about fundraisers. No big deal. Once night falls, *Hauntedween* leans in with a third act of luscious Halloween trickery. You can smell the rubber masks and tubes of drug store blood. You can hear the Kentucky accents come alive again. You can feel the warmth of enthusiasm. Plus, an automobile really can blow up following a shotgun blast to the back bumper. You'll see it happen! (JZ)

# HEAVY METAL MASSACRE (1989)

## Bobbi Young aka David DeFalco

Bobbi Young, your life is calling. And it has very good news.

The first ten minutes of *Heavy Metal Massacre* consists of a credit sequence. Only, you can count the credits on one hand. What this means is that writer/director/producer/star Bobbi Young aka David DeFalco utilizes this standard film component for something else. Namely, to show us his apartment. And to show us how cool he looks when he stares into the camera, clad in full Faster Pussycat regalia, amidst a wash of disorderly thrash metal, black-light tiger posters, ceramic skull busts, and Radio Shack video effects. This is oblivious, misanthropic trash in its purest form. And it is magnificent.

While most SOV features attempt to establish some sort of narrative veneer, Bobbi said: “Fuck all that. I just wanna make a horror movie with me in it.” So that’s what he did. Now, the term “movie” means many different things to many different people. In the case of Mr. Young, this term was stretched out and violated until it resembled a stoned, solarized assemblage of random incidents. Admittedly, *Heavy Metal Massacre* does have a plot. It’s a lot like 555, in that someone (Bobbi) is assaulting and killing women while two foul-mouthed, hard-ass cops track him down. But that means nothing to us. The plot is not the focus. The focus is Bobbi. His hangouts. And his fascination with documenting unequivocal awkwardness in the presence of naked boobs.

On a fundamental level, this film is nothing more than songs playing while people do things. But we need that. That's the whole foundation; imagine The Melvins in a sloppy kiss with S.O.D. while gargantuan hair convenes at a gross suburban bar and/or the world's most depressing apartment. It's unbelievable. But it's also

what makes *Heavy Metal Massacre* watchable. These moments of indifference allow us to breathe, to reconvene, and get ready for whatever ridiculous shit flies out of Bobbi Young's studded wristband next. And believe me, that thing is filled to the brim with ridiculous shit. Do you own a pair of neon pink checkerboard underwear? Bobbi does.

Nothing in *Heavy Metal Massacre* is predetermined. It can't be. The film is far too hilarious, far too erratic, for that. From guileless lines delivered in thick Providence, RI accents ("C'mon. I don't DO peeing.") to close-ups so extreme that we can't tell what's happening (unless it's the one of Bobbi's crotch while he puts on a pair of leather pants), *Heavy Metal* is where you want it to be. Yet maddening 80s vector graphics and indefinite sexuality aren't the only elements that score.

Towards the end of the film, Bobbi refuses yet another chance to get laid and ties up yet another girl in his warehouse apartment. He binds her to a chair and covers her with a sheet. Then, in a slo-mo coup borrowed from *Sledgehammer,* Bobz charges the girl and slugs her with a sledgehammer. The sequence feels like it lasts for three days. It startled me. This was the only moment in *Heavy Metal Massacre* that didn't encourage laughs or unconsciousness. On the contrary, it was a gritty mood refashioning which rarely occurs in the SOV gutters. Granted, there were also Corvettes and a chainsaw kill and a girl barfing on a corpse. But none of that was unsettling.

At 80 minutes, I thought, "I'm getting bored. Bobbi could probably wrap this up. But how? There's no end in sight." Three minutes later,

the film ended. Just ended. No conclusion. No justification. Right when I needed it to stop. Handled like a pro. (JZ)

# THE HEREAFTER (1983)

**Michael J. Murphy**

A gold digging wife. A scheming gardener. An inheritance. An 85 minute film that has just about enough incident to fill 45 minutes. This is another movie from the truly individual Michael J. Murphy. I'm not sure why he chose this one to be feature length. The actors from his *Invitation To Hell/Last Night* double feature appear here. The guy who becomes the demon in *Invitation* inherits an estate with many unpleasant family memories attached. He marries the leading lady from *Last Night* who is scheming with the gardener to kill her husband. But the plan goes awry and the husband lives. What will they do now?

I could tell you the whole plot here. Maybe I will? So, the husband . . . no, I won't. The film looks and feels a lot like *Invitation To Hell* but it's more of a *Psycho* variation with some bursts and twists and a ZONK! at the end. A ZONK is a variation of a ZING. It is a plot point presented as a huge surprise or twist but doesn't quite make it. It's a moment that should have you saying "Of course!" or "Oh!" but, instead, makes you feel like you missed something. Byron Quisenberry's *Scream* has a ZONK! at the end.

It could have been a decent episode of *The Alfred Hitchcock Hour* with its twists and turns. I kept hoping that *The Hereafter* would suddenly somehow get shorter but it doesn't. And as it goes, the boredom builds to dangerous levels. Perversely, I'm looking forward to watching it again. It's the style of his films that I admire. It is a low, low budget aesthetic that is similar to other low budget filmmakers but is very much his own. Occasionally, Mr. Murphy feels like a more sophisticated Don Dohler, but that may be because he's British.

You will be bored watching this movie. But it's the *Night Of Horror* type of bored, the kind of boring that becomes so profoundly dull that

it turns a corner and becomes fascinating at a fundamental level. Questions asked are: “Didn’t anyone realize that nothing is happening?” “Couldn’t someone have seen that the lack of incident might not be interesting for all viewers?” “Why am I still watching and why is the ‘nothing’ of this film so enticing?” Why do I want to explore this world further? (DB)

# HIDE AND GO SHRIEK (1987)

**Skip Schoolnik**

A Dodge van stops at a red light. Suddenly, a bunch of kids burst from the doors, run around like maniacs, and jump back in the van. That’s what you call a Chinese Fire Drill. And that’s also what you call the most exciting thirty seconds in *Hide And Go Shriek.*

After the fire drill, eight almost-college kids decide to spend the night in a gigantic department store called Fine Furniture. Why? Duh. Sex.

John, the main guy, happens to be the son of the store’s owner, so getting in is no problem. Unfortunately, getting out is the hard part. Zing! While the kids get down to the business of taking off their pants, a cross-dressing killer locks all of the doors and slowly begins bumping off the cast. Between the unevenly placed kill scenes, we’re attacked with tight shots of unattractive people making out, very loud recurring sound effects, mannequins, and yelling. Most of the film is dedicated to travelogue footage of the store. There’s one nasty gore sequence, lots of boobs, and a surprising number of dead people wearing nothing but underwear. One girl has a sinus problem and frequently rubs her nose. I liked her.

*Hide And Go Shriek* has all of the golden bad-slasher requisites. Unfortunately, it has no idea what to do with them. Forty minutes of incidental hubbub, dorky dialogue (“Fear is not in my vocabulary, squid!”), and literal hide-and-seek games is one thing. Copy and pasting those elements for a full 90 minutes is another all together. By the time things started to wrap up, the sight of yet another Fine Furniture tour led me to daydream about the Chinese Fire Drill. But

in my version, the kids do not jump back in the van. They break into Michael Jackson impressions. Then, the van's driver, Hindi Freddy Krueger from *Mahakaal,* combs his mullet and waves his Freddy glove in front of the camera. Everyone laughs and falls in love while some lawn sprinklers turn on. That's what I want to watch right now. Not this. (JZ)

# HOLLOW GATE (1988)

**Ray Di Zazzo**

It's Ray Di Zazzo! Fuck yeah! I don't know Ray Di Zazzo, but I love saying his awesome name. That's probably why I'm so nonplussed about *Hollow Gate.* Nothing can live up to all that Zazz.

Halloween night, twelve years ago. A kid, Mark Walters, bobs for apples. It's not going well. His stepdad says, "Sissy! Even the girls can do it!" Then, he dunks Mark's face in the apple tank. Halloween night, ten years later. Mark works at a gas station. A couple pulls up, dressed as vampires. They start doing it in the front seat. Panties are removed, insults are lobbed, and Mark blows up the car. Halloween night, two years later. Mark asks a woman for a date. She declines. She gets stabbed. Halloween night, present day. Mark moves in with his grandma at Hollow Gate. A group of teens stop by to deliver some Halloween costumes. Mark kills them one by one, donning a different generic costume for each murder. Yes, the same thing happened in *Fade To Black.* But that movie did not have a killer who called his victims "gooks" regardless of their ethnicity.

Before falling off the face of the earth, Ray Di Zazzo wrote and directed *Hollow Gate* in Oklahoma. The film is surprisingly unremarkable and sedate for a SOV slasher. There's a lot of padding (Grandma painting, golden retrievers hanging out, cops searching the woods). The nonsensical plot goes nowhere. Photogenic locations are put to good use, but I was mostly too annoyed to notice. So, I started to look deeper. What could I find to engage myself? This is what I came up with:

1. Allen is a Harold Ramis look-a-like who screams every single line he's given, no matter the context. When he appeared onscreen, I found myself thinking, "This movie might actually be kind of awesome." Then he died.

2. Two miscast gay men struggling to recite lines about "brewskis" and "hot chicks."

3. A car explosion.

That's it. I'm Zazzed out. (JZ)

# HOLLYWOOD'S NEW BLOOD (1988)

**James Shyman**

This movie is the perfect length. It's 75 minutes long, including a seven minute recap, but it feels unfinished. Or it's the perfect length, possibly, because it was unfinished. But I really don't think it is unfinished.

The film is about an acting seminar in a house deep in the woods outside of Los Angeles. Someone starts killing everybody. Someone associated with a terrible Hollywood-related mishap from a while ago.

There's something very appealing about *Hollywood's New Blood.* The characters feel as if someone started writing them but forgot to finish. Characterization is very vague. Names are remembered only because they are said over and over. But, apart from the "jerky guy," none of them come alive. We go from scene to scene, straining to

remember what just happened and looking at the people and never getting that CLICK! moment where we match everybody up. Surprisingly, the film works just fine, possibly because of this.

In a body count movie, you think, “Who are these people”?

And then you think, “Who cares?” They take up space and then they die. But this isn’t really that type of movie. Only four people are killed who aren’t the killers. If it isn’t a body count film, we should have some clue about the characters in it but we don’t. In some films, that would be obnoxious and get in the way, but this film feels like all the set-up moments or character bits or something are missing. It’s fascinating that a film was made like this. Fascinating enough to keep us watching to the end to see if anything is going to solidify. This was a very wise decision by the filmmakers because the ending is the truly individual part of this movie.

*555* recaps its deaths at the end. *Madman* gives glimpses of killings at the start. This movie trumps both of those. The story ends. The awesome title graphic appears on the screen and the gloriously 80s theme song starts and goes on and on and on . . . as we see almost seven minutes of scenes from the film. But not the killing scenes. Scenes of people walking. Scenes of people talking but we can’t hear their voices. It goes on and on and on and it seems that these scenes were considered the film’s highlights. After the clips, we get the slowest rolling credits ever with that song playing again. All of this goes on for such an inordinate amount of time that you wonder who thought this was a good idea and then you wonder why it feels so transcendent. This sequence rises to the elevated “sheer audacity” pantheon of the driving scene from *Night Of Horror* or Slow

Motion Land from *Jimmy The Boy Wonder.* And it makes this film truly memorable, forever known as “The One with the Pointless Recap before the Final Credits.” A true honor. (DB)

# HOME SWEET HOME (1981)

**Nettie Pena**

Thanksgiving can be pretty boring. It’s all stuffing, football, and feigned conversation. Most of the time, everyone just kind of falls asleep while complaining about the weather. Or sharing their opinions about your cousin who just broke up with his girlfriend. She was on a reality show. She was not on PCP. That’s where *Home Sweet Home* comes in.

Thanks to *Home Sweet Home,* a Thanksgiving slasher from producer Don Edmunds (producer-director of *Terror On Tour),* the options for Thanksgiving day activities are now endless. And way more fun. So before you stick an electric carving knife in your ears, gather the family together. Pop in a VHS of *Home Sweet Home.* And then utilize one of the many alternatives that this film suggests:

1. MUSIC. The universal healer. All you need to do is paint your face like a mime, strap on a portable backpack amplifier, plug in a guitar, and slide around on the floor. *Home Sweet Home* suggests a series of searing Steve Vai-esque licks, but you could also play some UB40 shit.

2. HAVE SEX. Everybody likes sex. Make lots of it. Do it in the Mustang convertible, in the bedroom, in front of your children, in your attached apartment, wherever. No one will fall asleep.

3. MAGIC TRICKS. So easy. All you need are four metal balls, an egg, more mime make up, and a King Arthur accent. Visualize David Copperfield. Realize Donn Davison. It’ll happen.

4. PCP. Obvious. Just like Jake Steinfeld, the macho goon slasher in *Home Sweet Home,* you can inject PCP into your family’s tongues

and watch the fun unfold. Atomic elbow drops on car hoods. A severe case of someone laughing. Death by guitar. Drugs go great with pumpkin pie.

Don't get scared off by all of this "business." As far as insignificant slashers go, *Home Sweet Home* is a pretty good time. Basically, guys with perms snag hot babes as Jake prowls the house in an unmotivated killing spree. He also runs over an old lady with a station wagon. There's no backstory to anything and the film devolves into padding and pitch-black cinematography at the hour mark. With all the PCP, sex, and hot shredz going on, I didn't care. (JZ)

# HONEYMOON HORROR (1982)

**Harry Preston**

*Honeymoon Horror* is the story of Frank, a killer with a burned face. Frank exacts his revenge against his cheating wife on Honeymoon Island. Three vacationing couples are also on Honeymoon Island. They get in Frank's way. They die. There's not much else to it. A guy lifts weights outdoors in the middle of the night. Another guy's wig disappears. Honeymoon suites are decorated with banners that read, "Virgins need no urgin'! Married men do it better!" The photography, characterizations and pacing are all lifeless. So why have I seen this movie so many times?

Meet the sheriff of Meagher County. He is fat. He is a Fat Sheriff.

He is also a multi-tasker. Clad in coveralls and leaking buttocks sweat, The Sheriff spends most of his time licking cigars, eating hamburgers, grunting, and talking on the telephone – often at the same time. The Sheriff's routine patrol is broken up with visits to the local watering hole. An actual watering hole. Not a bar. Here, he unbuckles his belt, itches his bare feet, stares at the water, and notes, "It's so goddamn dull around here, even my rest breaks are boring!" The Sheriff, who is usually accompanied by the sound of a harmonica, has a determined personality. He says, "I know what's

goin' on, goddamn it!," and he means it. But this is not always the case.

When The Sheriff is first contacted about trouble on Honeymoon Island, he follows procedure. A woman has gone missing. The Sheriff notes that he "can't do anything" for 24 hours. The Sheriff is then notified of a dock fire, which was set by crazy Frank. Rather than launching an immediate investigation, The Sheriff replies, "I'll get back to you right away." It's clear that he won't. The Sheriff tells Deputy Jerry, "A guy can't get any sleep around here at all for crying out loud!" Then he eats a hamburger. Over the next few hours, Frank disposes of most of the honeymooners.

Frank is later dealt with; not by The Sheriff, but by two shotgun-wielding husbands. The Sheriff, in fact, does not show up until the following morning, because he locked his keys in a squad car. Watch this film immediately. (JZ)

# THE HOOK OF WOODLAND HEIGHTS (1988)

**Michael Savino & Mark Veau**

Nice people making a nice video about a psychopath that kills a child (and a chihuahua) with a barbecue utensil fashioned as a limb. NICE.

A few years following the satisfying *Attack Of The Killer Refrigerator,* co-director-writers Michael Savino and Mark Veau set about making a "real" movie. They still used video. They still cast their friends. And they still used overlapping soundtracks. But this time, they managed to bump things up to 40 minutes, and added an AC/DC-meets-Spinal Tap theme song titled "Hooked On You." What's that mean to us? *The Hook Of Woodland Heights* is another regional SOV hit from our friends in Massachusetts. If I were a PR man, I would say "GET HOOKED!" or "HOOK

IT UP!"

A skinny man with early-80s Metallica hair and skull-face make-up escapes from a sanitarium. He proceeds to massacre a neighborhood with his D.I.Y hook. Violence is exceptionally creative. Someone is killed with a hospital clipboard. The killer's incessant wrath spares no one in the neighborhood – adults, teens, children, animals, and even trees are susceptible to death by hook. And it all culminates with that old fashioned crowd-pleaser, The Hook To The Crotch. Sleaze for sleaze's sake at the expense of all else in SOV is nothing new. *Cannibal Campout* serves as good example. A guy eats a fetus in that film. But *Hook* doesn't focus on tits or drugs or rape. It almost feels wholesome. That's what sets it apart.

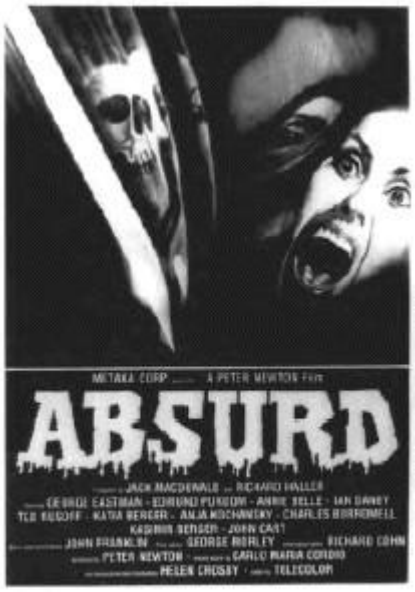
The film's bloodshed can never be taken seriously. That's due to both the monetary limitations of the production and The Hook channeling Lou Ferrigno as *The Incredible Hulk* when he kills. Plus, there's no crass agenda to turn us off. Just a lot of open space in a beautiful New England suburb where people chug 2-liters of soda, play tag in cemeteries, and upholster their cars with baseball cards.

After the movie ends, the tape keeps going. Someone with a thick Boston accent says, "Stay tuned for further artistic insanity . . . Behind The Scenes Of Hook!" What follows is 15 minutes of exactly what you've been wishing for: footage from Lick Studios (that's where The Heartbeats recorded "Hooked On You"), the film's world premiere at "The Club" and interviews with almost everyone involved. How could you not want to watch this? (JZ)

# HORRIBLE (1981)
# aka MONSTER HUNTER aka ABSURD
### Joe D'Amato

I can't 100% say why I enjoy this film so much. But I can go about 80%.

A large man is slowly rampaging through a small town and its surrounding woods. He can't be killed except by decapitation. A doolally priest is after him. The father of an immobile girl accidentally hits the killer with his car and leaves the scene of the crime. The irony is obvious. How many people has this guy hit with a car in his lifetime? Probably just this one. And, you guessed it, he hits an indestructible killer. After a stop at the hospital, the killer goes to that man's house for revenge! I do not think that exclamation point is out of place.




*Horrible* is a rip-off of *Halloween* made by folks who probably haven't seen the actual film they're "emulating." Or they ripped-off another film that they thought was *Halloween* but wasn't. Their misinterpretation/lack of knowledge of the source material has resulted in a strange, strange film. The indestructible killer. The

relentless person hunting him, who might be a little crazy. The disbelieving cop who comes to believe. A babysitter. Kids in danger. Lots of synths. And a long chase, which involves someone getting stabbed in the eyes.

Joe D'Amato isn't going to let you down, not in this film anyway. There's a lot of gore and a whole mess of weird behavior, including a strange babysitter/nurse dynamic and an injured girl who must remain immobile throughout until the end when she begins to move around just fine. Maybe her parents told her she needed to be immobile so they could have one less kid meandering around their home? No matter. The director tore the word "logic" out of his dictionary ages ago.

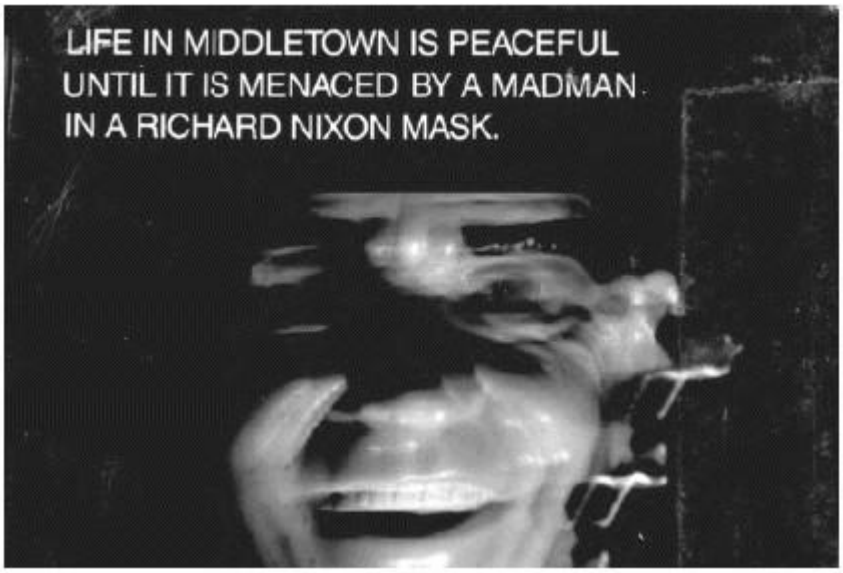
I love *Horrible.* At a distance, just hearing the story, this doesn't sound like much. But, watched in the right mood, this is koo-koo crazy. Every plot turn is off-balance and there are moments that will make you sit right up and say, "The hell?" It's sometimes poorly paced, which means that it can get close to tempting Snoozeville. For example, during the very lengthy and awkwardly blocked final stalking scene where I kept thinking, "Did the director turn the cameras on and then get a phone call? Where'd he go?" That scene and a few others test the patience but, generally, Joey D. is on top of things. Generally is good enough for me. (DB)

# HORROR HOUSE ON HIGHWAY 5 (1985)

**Richard Casey**

According to the back of the VHS box, director Richard Casey was a "notorious rock video maker." That must be true. The soundtrack for *Horror House On Highway 5* contains hits like "Holocaust!" and "Let There Be Some Drums." And that shit is pretty notorious sounding. Unfortunately, Casey forgot to make an actual film to complement all of the rock. Whoops! That's fine, though. A movie that combines several hundred musical styles, disappearing wigs, a killer in a Richard Nixon mask, and a shower scene that focuses on hairy armpits deserves some praise.

An “LSD guru” named Bartholomew dons the Richard Nixon mask. Joined by his two retarded sons, Barth follows a few college kids into his Horror House and makes swishing noises with his mouth. Doo-wop and a vocoder accompanies these events. Meanwhile, a couple of students construct bombs out of model rockets, a teacher wears his tie backwards, and a drunk jock says, “Hey, I’m gonna fuck you, man!,” before punching Barth. A couple of people have bruises on their foreheads and a woman is tortured with an iron that isn’t plugged in. Then, a rip-off of The Velvet Underground’s “Sweet Jane” plays over some scenes. It features a saxophone solo in the 80s style.




*Horror House* needs an intervention. Or even more drugs. Narrative plot points appear at random between scenes of people sitting in apartments and suspenseful stalk scenes. It’s all over the place. Therefore, I have a love-hate relationship. I hated the attempts at humor, but loved the sight of a killer in a Richard Nixon mask. I loved the scummy locations, but hated the whining cast. I loved the cheap aesthetics of the kills, but hated the scenes where people were hanging out in an RV. If the hierarchy leaned more towards sinister details and less towards pointless meandering, the scales would have tipped in the film’s favor. That doesn’t happen. (JZ)

# HOSPITAL MASSACRE (1983)
# aka X-RAY

**Boaz Davidson**

Seriously. Don't mess with Harold.

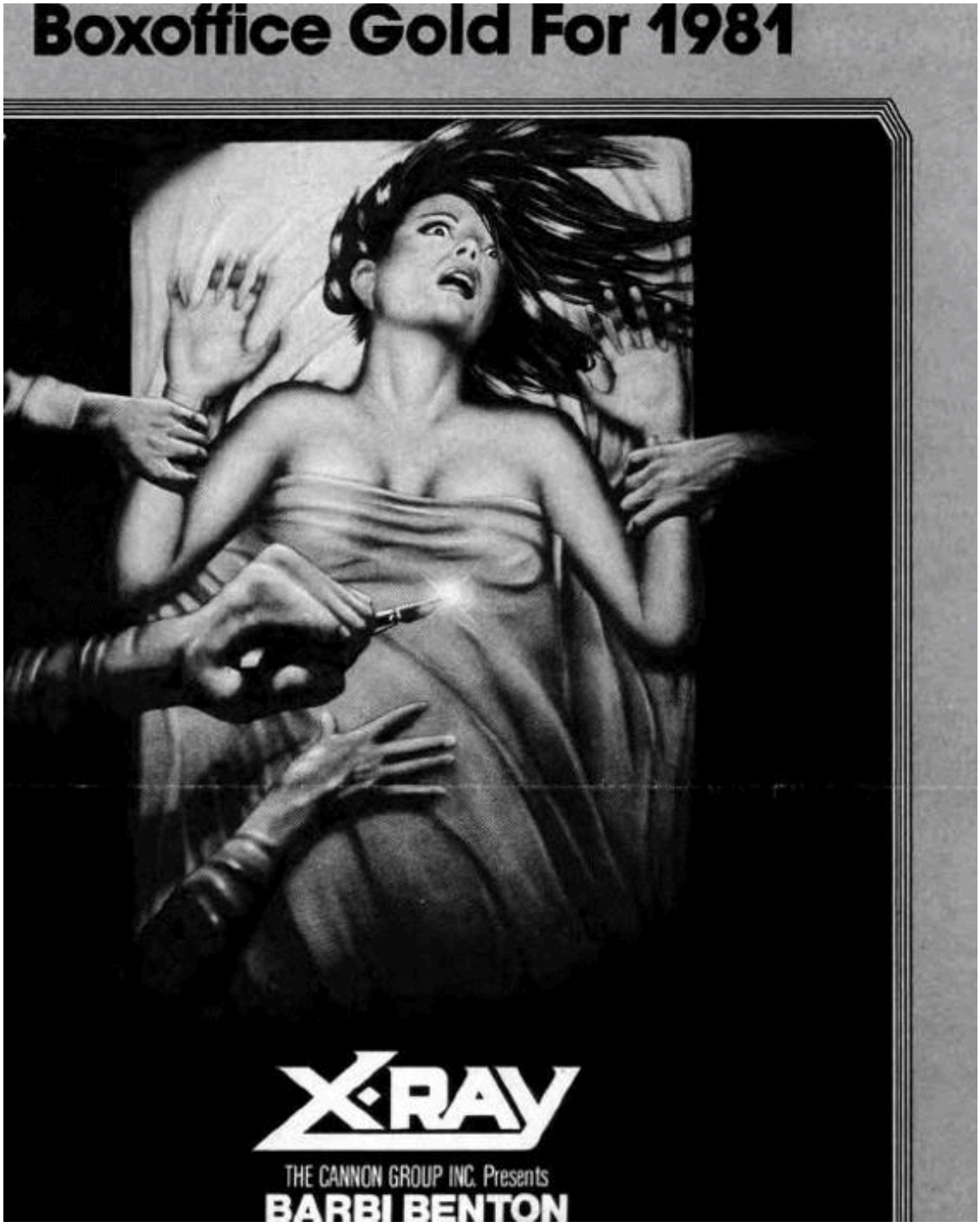
Hospital slashers are true rarities. Aside from *Halloween II* and *Visiting Hours, Hospital Massacre* is pretty much it. Something of a low-brow gore-fest on a high-brow budget, this film has two things going for it: 1. It's incredibly inept, and 2. It's incredibly inept. Throw in a dreary atmosphere and fifty instances of the same canned sound effect of a door opening and you've got something worth watching.

Prologue: little Susan's house. Valentine's Day, 1961. Two children (one girl, one boy) are playing with a train set. A kid leaves a Valentine's Day card on the doorstep. The girl opens it. The boy says something like, "Oh shit, it's from Harold." He crumples it up and they laugh. Harold is watching from the window. This incident is enough to send him over the edge. After the boy gets impaled on a coat-rack, we cut to twenty years later. Susan is all grown up and has boobs like torpedos. She's stopping by the hospital after work to check out some test results. Of course, Harold is back! And he's out for revenge, knocking off incidental characters in full surgeon's regalia. Not only that, he's pulled a switcheroo on Susan's x-rays, which now depict some kind of worm creature in her stomach. Susan spends the entire film trying to escape from the hospital staff. They do not want her to leave.

This is one of the most anemic slasher story arcs you'll ever encounter. A crushed Valentine's Day card drives a fat kid to dismemberment twenty years later? Amazing. And therein lies the appeal.

Director Boaz Davidson *(The Last American Virgin)* seesaws the grade school storyline with tons of random confusion and depressing stylings. There's lots of blood, claustrophobia, terrible acting, and a

whole lot of Harold attacking a wall for no good reason. Susan enters a room of patients who appear to have snakes in their pants. A doctor examines Susan's boobs for what seems like twenty minutes and we see the whole thing. I almost went nuts trying to figure out exactly what was supposed to be wrong with Susan's test results. But then Harold attacked a nurse while wearing a sheet and wailing like a small child. Nothing else mattered. (JZ)




# HOUSE OF DEATH (1981)
# aka DEATH SCREAMS

**David Nelson**

There seems to be an unwritten rule that comic relief and law enforcement can't mix within a horror film. The two personality types clash. The comic relief does something zany. The cop, usually a Fat Sheriff, tells the comic relief to knock it off or gives him a look. *House Of Death* contains one of my favorite examples of comic relief, in the character of Diddle. It also contains a stellar example of the Fat Sheriff, the mighty Sheriff Avery. Their paths cross only occasionally throughout the film. They may have come to respect one another if they had spent more time together. But other concerns overwhelm them. The small town where they live is being troubled by a psychopathic killer.

The film does not rush to the killings. They begin about an hour in. The killer does a lot of lurking. That's not a problem because the film conjures up a realistic small town world. It's the end of summer. Everyone goes to the carnival. Colorful characters, like Diddle and a group of his friends, laugh and play. We see a local baseball game. Everyone knows Sheriff Avery. A woman named Lily wheels her grandmother around. Grandma may be in a wheelchair but she has not lost her feistiness. There is also a woman named Agnes Bottomley who has a mentally deficient son. The town lives their lives. When they become complacent and get a bit sloshed, violence strikes.

Where is our corpulent law enforcement, Sheriff Avery, as this happens? He spends most of the movie meandering around, solving no crimes. He takes a dirty magazine from a kid. He shows a lot of anger towards the town's "good time girl" Mona.

There is an insinuation that the Fat Sheriff might know something more about these killings than he's letting on. That goes nowhere. In the end, he shoots the killer in the head several times. He did his job right there.

Diddle is a man who knows how to make people laugh. That's why he is the comic relief and not, for example, the humorless killer. Comic relief works best when we don't need to know why the person in question is funny. When Diddle is at the carnival, he goofs with the mallet at the strength machine. He prances. He yells, "Sex fiends!" He is simply funny in the same way that water is simply wet. His friends laugh and laugh.

The killer in this movie suffocates people, swings a machete, cuts Mona in half and kills Diddle. Could the killer have been stopped before the slaughter began if our fat friend and our funny pal hooked up and combined their talents in some way? I think Sheriff Avery could have learned to laugh with Diddle. I think Diddle could have learned to respect the sheriff. They just needed time. (DB)

# HOUSEBOAT HORROR (1989)

**Kendal Flanagan & Ollie Martin**

Somewhere along the shoreline of Australia's Lake Infinity, a rock band has rented several houseboats. Their plan is to shoot a rock video. The band is very popular at a club called Underground Disco. I imagine Underground Disco to be a large room, three hundred feet under the ground, with a mirror ball. A disco with the Mole People serving drinks. Sadly, we never see this place. The band and their crew party a lot. The locals tell them vague things about reckless "film people" who accidentally started a terrible fire while shooting at the lake. The houseboats leave the docks. A horribly burned man with a knife kills everyone.

*Houseboat Horror* is a professionally made Australian SOV horror film. The picture looks good. The sound is always audible. The movie is set deep in the woods and on the edges of the lake. I couldn't

really tell you if I was seeing all of the majesty of Australia or not. But it sure looks nice. The killings aren't all that suspenseful. But they are violent. Much of the film is scenes of these people talking and hanging out on the boat. Yet it's all comforting because of the location, the characters and the languid journey along the lake. Even though it's a film about a crazy man murdering people.

The band has more attitude than musical ability. One of them is always drinking. One of them has huge hair, tamed with a headband. They yell a lot. They smear make-up on each other. They argue about their song "Young & Cool & Groovy." One of them believes that "This song is a bag of shit." The video involves them standing around lip syncing poorly to their lyrics. If this is a big attraction at Underground Disco, I'm not sure I want to risk the descent into the earth.

Additionally, the movie has a whole bunch of other people in it. Who are they? Who knows. The band stands out because they're always yelling or singing that song. I know one guy was named Bernie because I thought a woman was calling him "Honey" over and over again. But it turned out that I was wrong. There was a nude woman who I mistook for another nude woman. One man seemed to get killed twice but it turned out there were actually two different guys. For the most part, you can ignore the individual characters. Let the languid Lake Infinity flow past you. When the killings begin, you can sit up and start to pay attention. Or not.

If you want a slasher that will scare you, pass this one by. If you want one that will leave you feeling depressed, it's not this movie. If you want a classic, *Houseboat Horror* isn't it. But, some days you want to be in the company of folks you can sit quietly with and just relax. This movie feels calm and refreshing and, if need be, you can drift off during it. That's a definite plus. (DB)

# HUMONGOUS (1982)

**Paul Lynch**

In the summer of 1946, Ida Parson is raped. Her attacker is torn apart by dogs. Ida is left catatonic and pregnant. The incident occurred on the Parson family island in the Thousand Islands. Ida's love of dogs gets the place nicknamed "Dog Island." Thirty-six years later, Eric, Sandy, Nick, Donna, and Carla decide to go sailing. They pick up a man whose boat has broken down. That night, their boat runs ashore on Dog Island, which seems deserted. The group learns that they are not alone. Ida's deformed son is alive, crazy and a killer.

Much of *Humongous* consists of the six shipwrecked people walking around Dog Island. They walk through the woods. They walk through the almost-deserted mansion. They walk up and down stairs. They walk around a lot. Ida's unnamed son eventually discovers the intruders and starts killing them. While that happens, they still walk around a lot.

*Humongous* is a film that's built on suspense and the audience's own discoveries. The pre-credit sequence gives us the background. Over the credits, there are a series of photographs of Ida. She goes from a happy debutante to a scarred, vacant-eyed woman surrounded by dogs. The characters in the film don't know what's on the island. But there is something lurking around. Through photographs and a diary, the existence of the baby is discovered. Then, something begins to howl madly in the basement.

The actors in the film are decent. There are no performances that elicit cringes. The characters are simply nondescript. There's a cute leading gal, Sandy, whose character never goes beyond cute. There's Eric, the lead guy, who's kind of hunky but that's all. Carla wears large glasses. That seems to imply that she might be very smart. She's not really very anything but quick to panic. The relationship between Nick and Donna seems to be crumbling. There is a growing resentment between them, which feels like it might become interesting for the viewer. They die early. Sandy and Eric carry most of the film. They are the ones who wander endlessly. But it's not like they're looking for the Ark of the Covenant. They find the

aforementioned evidence and a crib. That should make it crystal clear. It takes the characters longer to get there than the viewers. Consequently, the whole film gets a bit dull.

I've watched *Humongous* six times. Every time I watch it, I forget why I'm not too fond of it. After 45 minutes, I'm bored and I remember why. It's all of that walking. This film could have been more satisfying. If the pre-credit sequence was removed, it would be a stronger film. We know the set-up and some of the backstory for Dog Island. Through much of *Humongous,* the viewer is one step ahead. We should have been in the dark with the characters. Together, we could have solved the mystery of Dog Island. And I'd never get bored. (DB)

# THE HUNGAN (1991)

**Randall DiNinni**

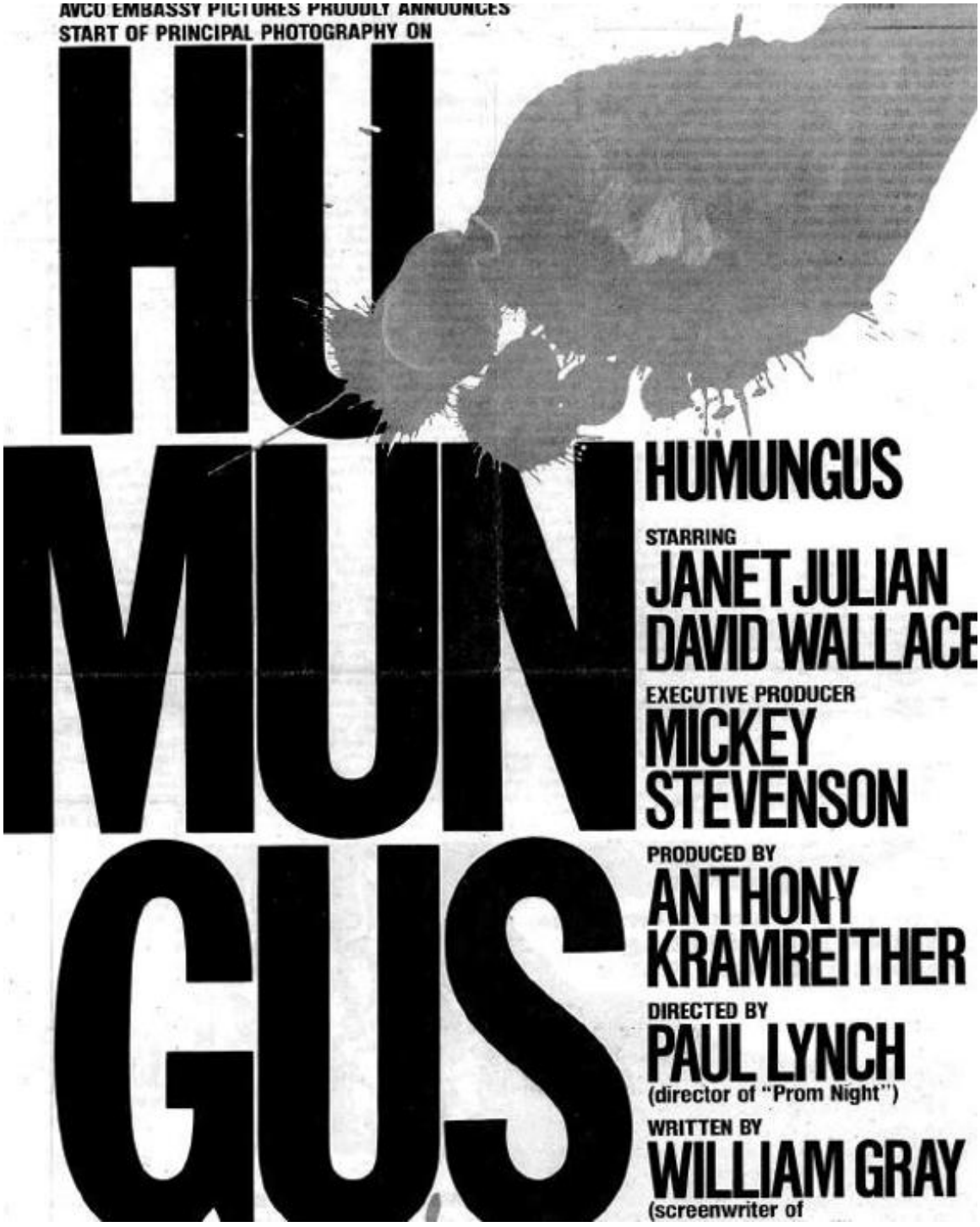
*The Hungan* is an awesome film. I don't know where it came from or why it was made or who made it. But I do know awesome when I see it.

Jack Palance narrates the opening minutes. He talks about the Hungan, a voodoo priest. Palance describes several rituals that the Hungan performs. During one of these, the Hungan summons a re-animated corpse to kill a group of young people. A shady scientist in a medical clinic is seen piecing together a body, Frankenstein-style. The corpse has big white hair, wrinkled skin and a large claw-like hand. The power of the Hungan animates the corpse, which kills the scientist. The corpse begins slaughtering the young people who have gone camping. The mix of voodoo with science is an unconventional way to create a monster. Why not just have a corpse in a cemetery come to life and kill? Why all the scientist stuff? I find it interesting to think about. But, the true joys of this film come from the presentation, not the plot.

The movie is 99 minutes long. Yes, this is a super low-budget slasher film that is longer than most Woody Allen movies. There are

several lengthy dream sequences. In the clinic, a doctor takes three full minutes giving a physical exam to a very large man. A janitor and a security guard at the clinic play practical jokes on each other. During a long sequence at a party, the hard rock power trio Cry Wolf plays a bunch of songs. There is a Pee-Wee Herman impersonator dancing while they play. The main characters don't arrive at the campsite until an hour into the movie.

To some, this type of set-up might be intolerable. Not just the length of the film, but all the dancing and music and scenes with random people. To me, the length means that we get to enjoy the scenes I've mentioned above. Should someone have cut the scene of a fat man in a doctor's office? Probably. Do I enjoy every minute spent with him? Definitely. In a normal horror film, the group would reach the campground in fifteen or twenty minutes. One hour would be a tremendous amount of time if there weren't mad scientists and Hungans and Pee-Wee Herman impersonators. The story of the film is secondary to the minutiae that fills it. The Hungan and all of the killing takes a backseat to these more personal elements. Whether that was the intention or not, that is the movie we have.




I know the reason why the film is so long and why there are so many moments that seem superfluous to a horror film. Director Randall DiNinni knew that he might have only one shot at making a movie. So, he put everything he could into the film. The supernatural plot, the mad scientist, the party, the woods. Then, he put everyone he

knew into the film. The corpse goes on a rampage after leaving the clinic. He kills random people on the street and in a diner. I believe all of those people were friends. DiNinni didn't want to leave anyone out. In one scene, two drunks rest against an alley wall and talk. One of them is incoherent. The corpse kills them both. From the credits, we learn that the incoherent man was named "Howard (Bumps) Randolph." The film is dedicated to "(Bumps)." Why put an incoherent man in your film? Because "(Bumps)" was a friend. Friends go in the film. *The Hungan* could have been a 75 minute film. But the director chose to make it longer. Longer than almost every other film in this book.

Here's a beautiful example of the sort of scene that would have been trimmed in any movie but this one: the guy throwing the party introduces Cry Wolf. The band plays a song that is pure 80s hair metal. The camera points at them from the other side of the room. People dance. You can barely see the band. This goes on for two minutes. The great thing about the film's length is that this scene will not preclude something like this happening again ten minutes later. It does not mean that we won't get a long scene where the campers chat amongst themselves, sometimes incoherently, as they stroll to the campgrounds. It does not mean that we won't get a long scene where some waitresses that we've never seen before chat about a date one of them had. It means we get it all. And I love it all.

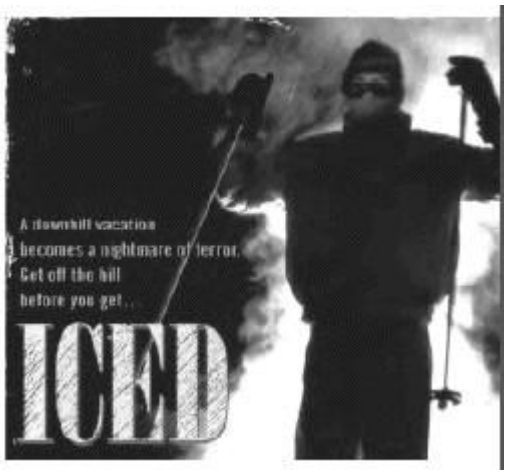
*The Hungan* is a long movie but it's a full movie. It's an overstuffed gift on your birthday. It's an extra five bucks in your wallet. It's that one last piece of shrimp in the sauce. It's chocolate with peanut butter inside. It's a message from the supermodel of your choice. It's a weird wallow filled with joy. (DB)

# ICED (1988)

**Jeff Kwitny**

I've never snorted cocaine. I have seen *Bright Lights, Big City,* though. That pretty much makes me an expert. Therefore, I suspect

that a large amount of cocaine was present during the writing, shooting, and editing of *Iced.* It's just that good.




What happens when Jeff loses a midnight downhill ski race, and later finds his girlfriend fucking the guy that beat him? You got it! After screaming "YOU FUCKERS!" and grabbing some skis, Jeff hits the slopes and kills himself on a big fake rock. Or does he?

Four years later. After his apparent suicide, Jeff's "friends" are still shook up about it. So shook up, in fact, that they can't resist the pull of a free weekend at Snow Peak Resorts. Trina, Jeff's old girlfriend, is now married to the guy she was fucking. She also wears a t-shirt that says "Rockadiles." It has a drawing of a crocodile playing a pink guitar. Karl, the coked-up train wreck, shows off the world's smallest ponytail. Jeanette (Lisa Loring, last seen in *Blood Frenzy)* has enormous hair and fantasizes about Alex, the real estate agent (writer Joseph Alan Johnson, who also ripped it up in *Berserker).* Dry ice. Enigmatic instant outfit changes. Kitchen workout routines. But wait! Who's that inconspicuous killer, clad in a neon blue snowsuit and oversized moon boots? You'll love finding out.

From the opening crap-pop song about "BASEBALL!" to the terrible freeze frame ending, *Iced* is a force to be reckoned with. Since nothing much happens during the first hour, we're granted free reign to mingle. Consider that a privilege. Director Jeff Kwitny has assembled a parade of asinine choppiness that's fit for a king, filled

with total morons and questionable logic. Telephoning for dire help or ordering a pizza? Licking coke off ceramic dishware before or after drying yourself with a towel? Revealing your wooden leg or waiting until someone stabs it? That's how it goes. The sex is hot 'n' heavy, the gore is laughable, and everyone wears moon boots.

P.S. ROCKADILES. (JZ)

# INTO THE DARKNESS (1986)

**David Kent-Watson**

"OH SHIIIIIT! I just got off the horn with Donald Pleasance's agent. Dude's gonna be in our movie."

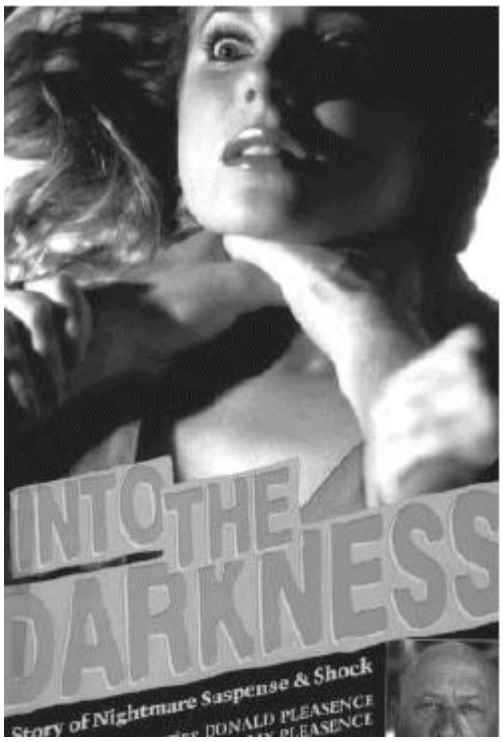
"WHAAAT!!! That's insane, dude. Are we gonna rip off *Halloween?"*

"Nah, fuck that. We need to go Italian neo-realist. I am feeling the Olmi."

"I am feeling THAT. Let's fuck this fuckin' shit."

The genesis of *Into The Darkness* didn't play out that way. For one, it's British. And Brits don't talk like that. But the film has Stupid American written all over it. So what better way to introduce this ticket to unconsciousness than with some bro-versation? Plus, I entertained myself while writing it. If you were entertained by reading it, we've both got one up on this film.

*Into The Darkness* is the rare SOV that tries to convince its at-home audience that they are viewing a real film. Following in the footsteps of *Blood Cult* and most of the Emmeritus Productions filmography, the filmmakers keep the technical textbook close by.




*Darkness* is well lit, populated with legit thespians, and hot for static shots of faraway lands that probably took hours to set up. The plot is negligible. A damaged man (his mom was literally a daytime whore) is assuaging his kill-urges during a photo shoot for a fashion magazine. The photo shoot features ninjas, bikinis, and tennis rackets. It's the best part of the movie. After some time in London, we travel to Malta. Everyone complains about money. Roughly half of the runtime is dedicated to padding of the worst kind – airplane rides, car trips, photo snapping, swimming, sight-seeing, a parade, and Donald Pleasance removing a pair of gigantic sunglasses several hundred times.

Obviously, you want to milk Donald Pleasance for all he's worth. In other words: SOV *HALLOWEEN* RIP-OFF. We all want to see it. But no. Ye olde Donald serves as a red herring while spouting off fifteen minutes of nonsense. The filmmakers chose to make a bloodless, nude-free, anti-stylized Giallo that fancies travelogue landscapes over people. However, they did lift one scene, nearly shot-for-shot, from *Halloween.* It's the one in which Michael Myers, seemingly dead, rises over Laurie's shoulder before our eyes. Only the killer

from *Into The Darkness* is not Michael Myers. He's a blond Steve Perry from Journey in a full denim ensemble.

Why even discuss this film? Well, it's British. Aside from *Suffer, Little Children,* UK SOV is a rare breed. *Into The Darkness* is not a SOV rip-off of *Halloween* starring Donald Pleasance. I really wanted it to be that. Instead, it's another boring, late 1980s horror movie with Donald Pleasance that is also kind of bullshitty. (JZ)

# INVITATION TO HELL (1982)

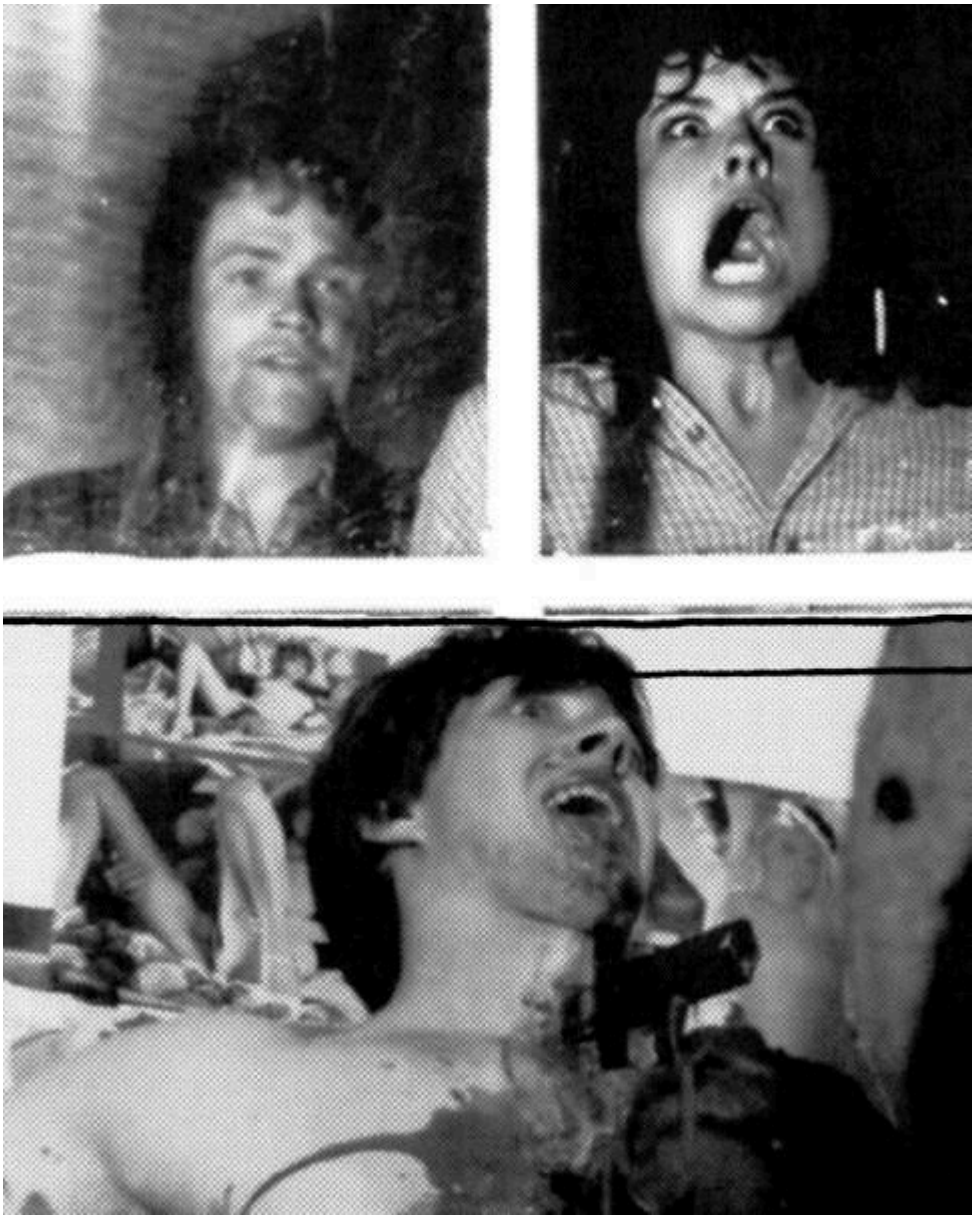
**Michael J. Murphy**

Pro tip: If a man wearing a plastic Incredible Hulk mask asks you to come over to his house and watch him lift weights, CALL

THE COPS.

UK director Michael J. Murphy is a lifelong practitioner of on-the-cheap filmmaking. He's also all over the map, directing everything from 1960s sci-fi Super 8 epics to 1990s video documentaries. *Invitation To Hell* was released in the prime era of England's Video Nasties crusade. It was the first of two 50 minute films *(Last Night* followed) that Murphy produced for the home video market. Before clutching this film in my hands, I had never heard of it. Wes Craven might have, considering he directed a TV movie with the same title in 1984. Wes Craven's film is notable because it has Punky Brewster in it. But it does not have a man getting his heart ripped out while being crucified over photos of naked women with their legs spread.

The man in the Hulk mask moves a log out of the road. A car passes. The car's driver is Jackie. Jackie has been invited to a costume party in a North Devon farmhouse. Everyone wears plastic monster masks. It's revealed that the farmhouse is a front for Satan, as he controls the various cult members who live there.



Jackie is a virgin. She has been summoned for sacrifice. Jackie spends most of the film being chased while people die. That's the basic structure, but here's what you really need to know:

Morris, a mute strongman, removes his Hulk costume after the first ten minutes. This is bullshit. If he wore this costume while killing the cast in gruesome fashion, *Invitation* would instantly be one of the most cherished films in my collection. That's what I was hoping for – a trash-gore slasher with a killer who dresses up like The Hulk. I can't think of anything I'd want more. Except maybe a movie where

David Hess rapes the Turkish Spider-Man's girlfriend from *3 Dev Adam* while the Turkish Spider-Man has a chainsaw duel with the Hulk killer. But, this movie is neither Turkish nor fully Hulk-ified.

*Invitation To Hell* feels like a one-act chamber drama that also attempts to actualize someone's subconscious on film. It's all over the place. Photography is washed out and unstable, and never fully engages with what needs to be communicated. The camera floats around while experimental synths constantly buzz. If this type of hallucinogenic presentation were attached to a more lucid film, we'd get something like *Satan War.* And that's fine. *Satan War* is another simplistic bedroom horror film that I'd watch anytime. But *Invitation To Hell* is far more layered in terms of its eccentricities, and therefore, far easier to appreciate. There's a homoerotic scene of a guy lifting weights in front of a porn collage while another guy ogles him and throws darts at photos of boobs and vaginas. Two men in blue jumpsuits square off in an unconvincing fistfight that feels like it lasts for two months. A demon with a melting face rips out guts that look like Red Vines. There's also an attempted rape (for Satan!) and a very downbeat ending. This film is kind of stunning. (JZ)

# INVOCACION SATANICA (1989)

**Xorge Noble**

The camera zooms around gravestones in a cemetery. Then, women wearing spandex lift weights and dance at a gym. These women have enormous breasts and even bigger asses. A nun walks through the room. The workout ladies play billiards. They are still wearing spandex. The same women are shown hanging out by a pool. Some of them swim. Library music in the style of *Phantom Of The Opera* plays over all of this. Ten minutes have passed.

You don't need to speak Spanish to know that *Invocacion Satanica* is a special motion picture.

*Invocacion Satanica* is a Mexican SOV film. It could be considered a typical Mexican horror movie. Maybe something between *Don't*

*Panic* and *Muerte Infernal,* but without grown men in pajamas and a midget killer. It's got blood-splattered bodies, rape-through-the-underwear, a Ouija board, and no subtitles. But it also has scenes that are out of order, footage that repeats five times in a row, and conversations that take place in a shower when no water is running and everyone is dressed.

Three women in workout outfits discover a Ouija board in a basement. Cut to a teenage girl in a house. A man wearing a Panama hat storms in and chokes the girl. Cut to the man raping another girl. She is in her underwear. People hang out in showers or under trees. We're back at the gym and people are talking. Next, the man in the hat attacks another girl in broad daylight on someone's front lawn. She gets away. The earlier home invasion scene is repeated. But this time, another man enters the house and hits the rapist over the head with a bottle. Now, one of the home invasion victims lies dead on a lawn. A trickle of blood runs down her left cheek. A nun and some cops wearing Hawaiian shirts investigate. The Ouija board doubles as a blinking lamp through the miracle of stop-motion. Smoke from a smoke machine sprays while women's clothes are torn off by magic, or rather by someone off-camera pulling the clothes with strings.

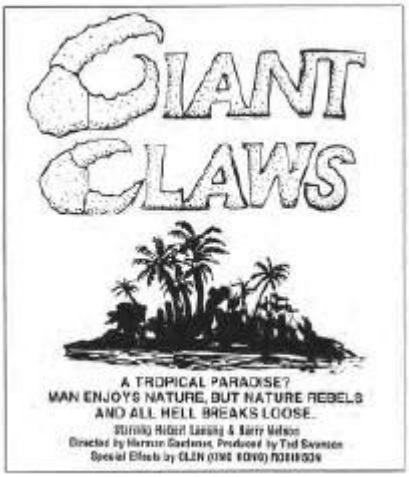
Take all of that and repeat it four more times. But vary the women who get their clothes torn off. Sometimes, this happens to a few ladies in spandex. Other times, it's a nun or a nurse. There are also two scenes at "Ami Hacienda Night Club," which feature a band lip-syncing and people dancing. It is revealed that Satan is a man in overalls with smoke billowing behind him. The movie ends when the Ouija board catches on fire.

*Invocacion Satanica* is not a typical Mexican horror movie, SOV or otherwise. A total disregard for continuity and logic take the film somewhere else. It's like Nick Millard visited a Mexican ghetto and tried to make a sequel to *Satan's Black Wedding* without the benefit of a translator. Like Millard's late 80s SOV films, much of *Invocacion*'s appeal lies in its extreme irrationality. Jump cuts occur at random, sometimes interrupting conversations. Speed metal instrumentals cut to silence, as if someone hit the pause button on a boombox. Then, the music cuts back in ten seconds later. Characters are killed, only to return later with no explanation. The camera zooms at all times, no matter the subject. For instance, a woman wearing lingerie is sleeping on a bed. The camera moves forward very slowly until we're up in her armpit. Cut to two women making out in a bathroom stall. Cut to the gigantic smile on my face. (JZ)

# ISLAND CLAWS (1980)
# aka GIANT CLAWS

**Hernan Cardenas**

A nuclear power plant has a small problem with radioactive water. There is a research facility that does a lot of work with crabs. Suddenly, the crabs begin mutating into giant-size. They turn against humanity. A series of people from the facility and the local seaside town band together to fight off the rapidly growing crabs and then the movie ends. It's an eco-friendly giant radioactive monster movie from the 50s that was made in the 70s. And released in 1980.




Decades don't automatically divide trends in the world of cinema. It might be easier if they did. Films such as *Day Of The Animals* and *Prophecy* have their place. They've taken the straightforward "There are crazy animals or insects killing us! Why us?" of the 1950s and begun explicitly blaming humanity for everything it brings upon itself. Those two films were released in the 1970s. *Island Claws* follows the same routine. But, this was the point in time when the slasher craze was beginning. Giant crab attacks were four or five years too late. It makes the film feel redundant. It makes me question why they didn't make something that was more up-to-date.

*Island Claws* does one thing that I really like. The film seems like it's going the nuclear-power-and-technology-is-going-to-destroy-us-all route and then it forgets about that plot thread. The movie becomes an are-these-crabs-going-to-kill-us movie. In the end, a mega-giant crab shows up. The crab is not very mobile. It looks like a crab and it has very impressive claws. But, like much of the movie, it feels

perfunctory. The giant crab appears, everyone attacks it and then it's killed.

After that, the movie immediately ends. All the questions about pollution and the crabs and, well, anything, are now done. Giant monster movies in the 1950s used to end like this. In *The Deadly Mantis* and *Beginning Of The End,* the movie was over when the monster died. *Island Claws* is not trying to be a giant monster movie from the 1950s dealing with the concerns of the 1970s. Its heart rests completely in the 1950s. All the rallying for causes and trying valiantly to change the course of humanity's progress was smokescreen and filler to make the film seem more topical. In the end, it's all about the crabs.

I appreciate the film for that. But the dull characters, slow plotting, and "Who cares?" attitude towards everything but the twenty minutes of crab stuff lower my appreciation. Watch *Island Claws* and witness one trend draw to a close. Then watch *Final Exam* and see another, more pertinent trend begin. (DB)

# ISLAND OF BLOOD (1982)
# aka WHODUNIT?

**Bill Naud**

"Somebody is killing according to the lyrics!"

This line undoubtedly guarantees that *Island Of Blood* is a force to be reckoned with. I fell asleep.

One island, one film production, one school, ten people, and no phones. *Island Of Blood,* this is your life. As each one of our entertaining eccentrics (frustrated rockers, a nerd, a mongoloid, a princess, a girl on crutches, a Jazzerciser) eats death, a portable cassette player belts out a tinny punk song. Naturally, the lyrics are appropriate to each murder. Death by boiling water? "Boil me! Boil me!" Spear to the head? "Spear me! Spear me!" Nailgun to the back? "Nail me! Nail me!" Love it! Love it! Then, around the 45-

minute mark, unhealthy amounts of false scares, rehearsal scenes, and people wandering around in the dark tainted my love. Permanently.

At some point during production, the filmmakers of *Island Of Blood* thought, “We need to get it together. *Blood Song* is killing it with those flutes. We need to do something like that.” So, they severed the plot, upped the musical ante, and embraced the novelty. After this epiphany, laziness crept in. A rough cut was shown to family and friends. Someone’s wife noted that the movie was “just people walking around on a dark island” and “no one would pay to see that.” She then added: *“Humongous.* Never forget.”

*Island Of Blood* has the dirt-cheap slasher down pat. Staccato synths. Graceless jump cuts. Perplexed performances. Brooding attitudes. It’s almost enough to tickle fond memories of *Satan’s Blade* or *Honeymoon Horror* – two early 80s poopers that excel in defectiveness. Yet, even with the inclusion of some wonderfully baffling moments (a sequence that cuts between a chainsaw murder and a flowerbed) and a refreshing, snufferific climax, *Island* sinks during its second half. Everybody loves a school hallway chase scene (hi, *Fatal Games!),* but enough is enough. We’re left to connect the dots, but they’re too dark to make out. Does that even matter? A little. Remember the songs. (JZ)

# THE JAR (1984)

**Bruce Toscano**

*The Jar* has no beginning and no end. However, it’s filled to the brim with lethal farts.

Paul: “Crystal, are you always this perceptive?”

Crystal: “No, Paul, you’re just very obvious.”

How interesting! If you can sit through 80 minutes of even less involved conversations and hundreds of cryptic dream sequences, I

salute you. One-time director Bruce Toscano did not pull out the big guns when he made this artsy disaster. But, he did pull out the big sinks. Because there are lots of forboding shots of sinks in this movie.

The VHS box copy said that Paul was hit by a car during his daily jog. If the shots were in focus and the screen wasn't pitch black, I might have found that out for myself. Paul brings the car's driver (old man with a unibrow) back to his apartment. Then Paul yells at a mason jar, which houses a rubber *Ghoulies* reject. Paul sits around naked. Paul walks outside. Crystal, Paul's neighbor, tries to make friends, but Paul yells at her too. Paul dreams about bloody death, a toothbrush, religious cults, battlefields, and sex with Crystal. Paul and Crystal have lunch for fifteen hours. Thankfully, a man with a mustache shows up at Paul's apartment and starts screaming.

Everybody likes it weird and creative, BUT C'MON. Close ups of inanimate objects, flashing Christmas lights, and a plate of scalloped potatoes with fake blood on them can't substitute for our inability to read the director's mind. The ambient synths were a nice touch, but I still wanted to punch Paul in the face every five minutes. I'm not a violent person, so let's leave it at this:

If you open up the pet-project downer known as *The Jar,* your whole house is going to stink. Nobody wants that. (JZ)

# KHOONI MURDAA (1989)

**Mohan Bhakri**

After spending 127 minutes watching *Khooni Murdaa,* a Hindi rip-off of *A Nightmare On Elm Street,* I sat back and ruminated. There is a burnt ghost character here that kills people in the style of Freddy Krueger. The kill scenes are almost all lifted from *A Nightmare on Elm Street* and *A Nightmare On Elm Street 3: Dream Warriors.* There are two lengthy musical numbers. I know this is part of the Indian movie tradition but it still takes me aback and makes me choke on my Horlicks Malted Milk. There was also a large amount of comic relief. The comic relief and the musical numbers rarely mixed with the horror. No eerie atmosphere was ever sustained for more than a few minutes. I chalked that up to the audiences having short attention spans. Of course, this movie is over 30 minutes longer than the *Nightmare* films it's emulating. That I can't explain.

A crazy killer loves a woman. Her friends burn him to death and bury the body in a junkyard. The burnt man returns with a vengeance – not in people's dreams but as a murderous ghost. Meanwhile, a professor acts like he's trying out for the Hindu Bowery Boys. There was some sexual innuendo involving rubbing a woman's arm that I didn't understand. A man wearing a "Get a Grip On It" shirt appears

on a woman's toilet while she takes a bath. He sings. I spent much of the movie wondering how old the actors were. Surely there isn't anyone under twenty-five in this? Some of the guys look like they're in their late thirties. Are they meant to be younger? If so, lose the mustaches. Mustaches might have made the guys feel good but they also make them look too old.

The portions of the film dealing with the killer take up about 90 minutes of screen time. There is a very earnest cop who accomplishes little. A mystic man helps out. The last twenty minutes involve potential victims running around the killer's "house." His home looks like the decrepit dream house that appears in many of the *Elm Street* films. People punch the killer a lot. He punches back. Then, they reenact a lot of scenes from *Dream Warriors,* sans the music of Dokken.

Hindi cinema has a long, rich history associated with pageantry and big production values. But I'll be damned if this film doesn't look like it was shot next door to the guy making *Curse Of The Blue Lights.* "Overly melodramatic" or "excessively mugging" are the two styles of acting on display. The musical numbers seem to have been choreographed on the spot. The recreations of *Elm Street* killings are not stylish. The filmmakers seem to misunderstand what made those killings entertaining. For example, they recreate the scene from *Dream Warriors* where the woman gets her head slammed into the TV. In *Dream Warriors,* the TV is bolted close to the ceiling. The woman is far below it. Freddy's arms extend from the side of the TV and lift her off the ground, building the suspense. When this happens in *Khooni,* the woman is almost at the same level as the TV screen. So, the arms burst out and shove her into the screen. It is abrupt and anti-climatic.

Rather than sustaining one mood throughout, *Khooni Murdaa* presents us with a smorgasbord. The filmmakers were giving the audience for this film exactly what they wanted. People wanted a couple of scares and jumps. But they also wanted to enjoy some musical numbers and some scenes of slapstick comedy. The movie

looks weird to my eyes because I'm not part of that audience, but it's still worth watching to see the singing man on the toilet. (DB)

# KILLER PARTY (1986)

**William Fruet**

White Sister. Remember that name.

That's the name of the band that will kick your ass all over town during the opening scenes of this movie. It's all here: red spandex, greasy mullets, and guitar solos played on guitars without strings. The guy on the keys has high kicks that would make Bob Pollard blush. If I pressed "stop" after the first five minutes of this movie, it would be difficult to find a better five minutes anywhere in the world.

Unfortunately, 85 minutes of *Killer Party* remained.

After White Sister blows shit up, *Killer Party* isn't very exciting. There's over an hour of sorority hazing and red herring tedium. It goes something like this:

Jen, Viv and Phoebe are rushing a sorority. They seem to do a lot, but I can't remember any of it. We learn that a dilapidated frat house is haunted. The girls decide to hold an April Fool's costume party at the house, as that's a really awesome thing to do. The costumes aren't very arresting, save for the fat guy dressed as John Belushi dressed as a bee. After some dancing and make-out sessions, the film gets somewhat engaging. There are many killings, but most of them are bloodless. White Sister never returns.

*Killer Party* is a mundane mid-80s slasher with a listless plot, some blood, minimal nudity, and the hottest, shittiest metal band since *The Hungan's* Cry Wolf. If nothing else, check it out for that reason alone. I'm sure White Sister could use the royalties. (JZ)

# KILLER WORKOUT (1986)
# aka AEROBICIDE

**David A. Prior**

A woman has been chosen to appear on the cover of *Cosmopolitan.* Therefore, she needs a tan before the photo shoot. We see her breasts, but not her face. She enters a tanning bed. It goes haywire and burns the shit out of everything.

Another death at an aerobics gym. "Rhonda's Workout" is now open for the bizness.

Spandex. Sweat. Open mouths. Headbands. Leg warmers. Formidable synth-pop (“Animal Workout”; “Woman On Fire”). And hundreds of boobs, asses, and vaginas in the throes of sexually suggestive aerobics. If you’ve seen David Prior’s *Sledgehammer,*

you understand that he is not one to shy away from a great party. After viewing *Killer Workout,* you will never forget this fact.

While the ladies do their thing at Rhonda's Workout, a killer wielding a gigantic safety pin wreaks havoc in the locker room. We meet Rhonda herself, who is universally super-pissed. We meet a detective wearing a Members Only jacket who looks like Frankenstein's monster. We meet TED! PRIOR! as he pumps iron and abuses a mean uppercut and an even meaner mullet. Despite murders at her exercise palace, Rhonda does not shut it down. The asses keep shaking. The synth-pop keeps ruling. Eventually, the entire cast gets snuffed out. But they all return for another workout scene over the credits. Dead or alive.

*Killer Workout* is unequivocally awesome. Ultra-cheap, immersed in continuity errors, and straining to make sense of events that require no explanation, the film is a benchmark of what passed for "entertainment" in 1986. Prior even forgets to show us how a few people get killed. They just disappear. The entire experience can be summarized thusly: women aerobicizing, kill scene, women aerobicizing, kill scene, bodybuilder brawl, locker room sex, women aerobicizing, kill scene, bodybuilder brawl, surprise ending, women aerobicizing. That is a lot of aerobicizing. I could have used more. (JZ)

# KILLING SPREE (1987)

**Tim Ritter**

"I'm always ready for some hot action – on the job or off."

After sharing that bit of insight with us (and bedding a housewife), the TV repairman proceeds to establish his mastery of the roundhouse kick.

HOT ACTION. Let's have it!

After the surprise home video success of *Truth Or Dare? — A Critical Madness* in 1986, eighteen-year-old director Tim Ritter was ready for round two. But how do you follow up a hit? The legacy. The fans. The pressure. It's enough to quell the aspirations of any self-styled creative. *Truth Or Dare* made some waves. People liked it. So, why not make the same movie again?

*Killing Spree* follows the precedent set by Tony Malanowski *(Night Of Horror; Curse Of The Screaming Dead):* Take the plot of your last film (in this case, wife cheats on husband, husband kills everyone), add some more crazy stuff, and make history. Therefore, *Truth Or Dare*'s motifs – adultery, death, goofy faces – are recycled for this 16mm follow-up. And multiplied. Meaning that sometime in 1986, Ritter may have spent an evening with *Microwave Massacre* and *Three's Company* to come up with a film that's basically a blowjob gag and a misunderstanding.

This is a backyard gore-comedy about male insecurities and the extreme manifestation of said insecurities. The visuals are uniformly gray. The tempo is a mess. The camera sits still while people read magazines or stand in a foyer. So far, so good. But then, *Killing Spree* asserts itself. Nihilism is exchanged for "la haute comedie." Colored lights on faces! Bug-eyed shouting! A leading man whose name is actually Asbestos Felt in real life! This film is cheaper, yet more ambitious, than *Truth Or Dare,* and it's not as engaging as Ritter's surrealist debut, *Day Of The Reaper.* But there is a plot-summarizing rap song over the end credits. (JZ)

# KISS DADDY GOODBYE (1981)
# aka REVENGE OF THE ZOMBIE

**Patrick Regan**

An hour in, my tape of *Kiss Daddy Goodbye* hit a glitch. The VCR stopped and turned itself off. I was jolted awake. Instead of rewinding the tape and finishing the movie, I folded my laundry.

*Kiss Daddy Goodbye* is not the most exciting movie from 1981. It's not a waste of time, either. In fact, the film provides many moments of serene amusement. But there, in the serenity, lies the catch. *Kiss* is 100% serene 100% of the time. It moves quietly, slowly, and without passion. Essentially the story of two teleki-netic kids, their zombie dad, and the wooing of a social worker by a deputy, this extremely cheap film challenges us to pay attention, no matter what might be (unconvincingly) occurring onscreen. Thus, we turn to the details to hold our attention.

There's a new deputy in town. I didn't catch his name. He drives along an anonymous California coast to the accompaniment of big fat synths. During a grocery store chat, we get the basics. This town is very desolate. Nicholas, a tall man with a mustache, has two kids. These kids, Beth and Michael, can play Frisbee without hands and Atari without joysticks. And yet, they eat animal crackers and yogurt just like everyone else. WEIRD, RIGHT? After some very quaint bikers stab Nicholas, he dies. Beth and Michael see the crime and we spend the next 50 minutes watching them sit around and "think speak", i.e. staring blankly at each other while hanging out. They also raise Dad from the grave to enact revenge and chase surfers. Simultaneously, the deputy goes on a date with social worker Marilyn Burns from *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre.* They talk for a while. "I have some ADDITIONAL evidence for you to examine, tee hee!" Then they have sex. We get to see all of this. Except for the sex.

Exactly.

*Kiss Daddy Goodbye* is like witnessing a rhinoceros ballet choreographed by self-conscious robots. Everything is cumbersome, blunt, and overtly stilted, and nothing happens like we expect or want it to happen. Beth and Michael's faces are grimacing permanently. Fight scenes are impassive. Any hint of exploitive adrenaline is thoroughly buried by ill-timed edits and more "think speak." Taking all of this into consideration, it's no wonder that I fell asleep three times and said "Fuuuuck!" when the thing was still going after I finished folding laundry. (JZ)

# LAS VEGAS BLOOD BATH (1989)

**David Schwartz**

*Las Vegas Bloodbath* is a super gritty SOV film. It taught me three things that I can never forget. One, B.L.O.W. is an acronym for Beautiful Ladies of Oil Wrestling. Two, a pregnant woman can eat as much pizza as she wants, as long as she's wearing a bikini. And three, the visual combination of numbers one and two is, somehow, more grotesque than a man taking out his frustrations on a fetus.

Meet Sam Butler. He's a successful businessman and happy guy. After closing a big business deal, Sam heads home to celebrate with his wife Ruth. Unfortunately, Ruth is shacked up with a cop. Ruth also has extremely big and ratty blond hair. That may or may not be unfortunate. Sam walks in and shoots them dead. He spends the rest of the movie traveling around with Ruth's head and killing people.

This movie is 78 minutes long. The first 22 minutes are the setup. After Sam kills Ruth, he kills a "daytime whore." He says, "I can't believe there are so many whores even out in the daytime!" Then, Sam shoots a man in a bar. But before anything else happens, we get a break from Sam's rampage.

"Meet the Ladies of B.L.O.W.! Beautiful Ladies of Oil Wrestling!"

For the next twenty minutes, six ladies hang out in a living room. They are members of B.L.O.W. The camera runs. The women talk. Three of them are wearing bikinis, including Barbara. Barbara is also pregnant. Then, the ladies sit on the floor in their bare feet and eat beer, pizza, and donuts. Barbara has long black fingernails. She drinks milk, which dribbles all over her face and legs. She talks with her mouth full. Barbara is not self-conscious. My nausea suggests that maybe she should be.

Soon, the women watch themselves in a B.L.O.W. match on TV A B.L.O.W. match involves two women in bikinis half-heartedly wrestling on garbage bags covered in oil. The women push each other down. One wrestler lifts another one up. Then, very gingerly, she is dropped. Guys yell randomly from a small crowd. This goes on for a few minutes. If you don't understand the sex appeal of this scene, have someone explain it to you. Once they've explained it to you, you can explain it to me. Because I don't get it.

But then, Sam breaks into the house! The women are tortured and killed. Barbara is taken into a room that has walls covered in long sheets of construction paper. That's not a good sign. Barbara's fetus is ripped out and thrown against the paper. The other women are shot, decapitated, or attacked with drills. Sam mumbles and rants

the whole time. At one point, the visual mix of all of those dirty bare feet and a half-naked Sam fondling Barbara's boobs made me turn off the movie.

*Las Vegas Blood Bath* could have originated as a pilot for a B.L.O.W. TV show. But since the oil wrestling boom never happened, the filmmakers made a slasher concerning crazy Sam and his hatred of daytime whores. They even included a theme song called "Las Vegas Blood Bath" to make the film feel more "legit." This theory erases the confusion in my mind that is left in the wake of this hideous film. Oil wrestling may not be for everyone. But I think of it as a weird slice of Americana, like restaurants shaped like hot dogs or giant balls of twine. Or *Las Vegas Bloodbath.* (DB)

# LAS VEGAS SERIAL KILLER (1986) aka HOLLYWOOD STRANGLER IN LAS VEGAS

**Ray Dennis Steckler**

No one photographs people jumping into pools, delivering pizzas, or staring at neon signs like Ray Dennis Steckler.

In the 1960s, Steckler was the Jean-Luc Godard of exploitation filmmaking. Both had an unstoppable energy that resulted in a string of self-defining films. Both were of the first generation of filmmakers to be bred on cinema. And both employed unconventional editing techniques, beautiful photography, and cinematic homages. Where Godard mimicked Humphrey Bog-art in *Alphaville,* Steckler paid tribute to Huntz Hall in *The Lemon Grove Kids.* Godard riffed on the inanity of American musicals in *Une Femme Est Une Femme,* and Steckler did the same with *The Incredibly Strange Creatures Who Stopped Living And Became Mixed Up Zombies.* Steckler even had his own Anna Karina in the form of actress/wife Carolyn Brandt.

While the methods of these two filmmakers are comparable, their intentions are not. Steckler never took himself seriously. His movies feature men in gorilla suits and grasshopper monsters. While his talent was unquestionable, exploitive content and low budgets kept Steckler's films from mainstream recognition. And unlike Godard, Steckler didn't come from old money. If his movies didn't turn a profit, there was nothing to fall back on. Fast forward to 1986.

After churning out porn for fifteen years, Ray Dennis Steckler returned to straight exploitation with *Las Vegas Serial Killer.* A sequel to *The Hollywood Strangler Meets The Skid Row Slasher* (his only horror film from the 1970s), *Las Vegas* is exactly what I'd expect from Steckler in 1986. It's a poorly executed assemblage of unrelated ideas with no form and no function. It's a film without an audience. It's also a Ray Dennis Steckler masterpiece of a different kind.

Johnathan Glick has been released from prison. He spells his name with an "h." He strangles people. He was the Hollywood Strangler! But now, he's in Las Vegas. He's the Las Vegas Strangler! Glick looks like a very tired Serge Gainsbourg. He enjoys strip clubs, finds employment as a pizza deliveryman, and strangles women in broad daylight. When this happens, he off-handedly says, "Die garbage," like it's no big deal. Meanwhile, two men stuff guns in their belts and exit a cramped motel room. They ogle ladies on the strip and say,

“There’s the legs for me!” You think these guys are going to rape and kill, but they just steal purses and drive around in a little red car. Glick’s strangling and the two guys’ stealing repeat ad infinitum. Victims and situations constantly change, but methods do not. Radio bulletins, delivered by what may be a Speak & Spell, describe what we see onscreen. A few minutes later, the same exact bulletin is heard again. This accounts for maybe 15 minutes of the film’s 87 minute runtime.

During the rest of *Las Vegas Serial Killer,* the camera just points at things. Strippers stripping. A parade. Pool parties. An airplane museum. Prostitutes talking to johns. People eating pizza at “Pizza ’n’ Pizza.” A rodeo. A fashion shoot. Acres of neon signage. Conversations are overheard, but we rarely see who’s having them. Glick steals a camera and takes photographs. The two dudes rob a man and take his briefcase. Everyone meets. There is some tragedy.

From 1963-69, Steckler documented his surroundings under the guise of exploitation filmmaking. Friends were actors. His neighborhood was a set. Footage was either meticulously composed or shot on-the-fly. In *Las Vegas,* he’s doing the same thing, but with even less narrative. Exploitative elements (slow strangulations, nude roller-skating, inept muggings) take a back seat to random footage of Las Vegas. At the same time, Steckler layers the film with outdated 1960s music (surf instrumentals, noir orchestrations) and dialogue (“Let’s go find some broads!”). The film is dubbed Doris Wishman style – voices are heard, but no mouths are seen. In both technique and presentation, this is a film that’s not of its time. But then again, it is of its time. Steckler’s 1960s films never had naked women in hot tubs or Smurf toys.

The cumulative effect of *Las Vegas Serial Killer* is one of soothing emptiness. Once you grow aware of the repetition, and the fact that nothing’s going to happen, you get excited with anticipation. Everything becomes heightened. The film begins to feel like an experimental document, one completely removed from its slasher foundation. What will Ray Dennis Steckler share with us next? More

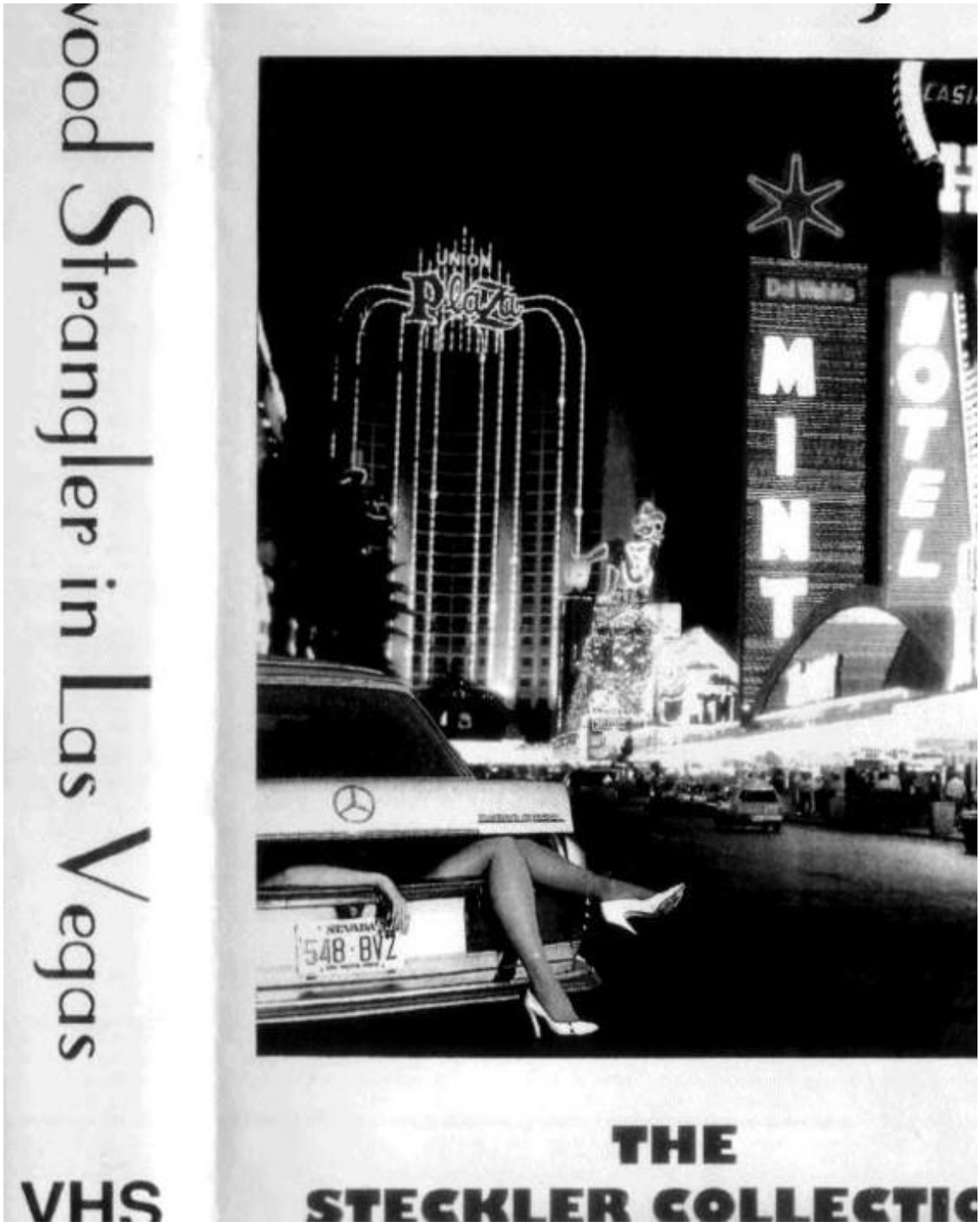
porno storefronts? Another reference to Cash Flagg, his 1960s pseudonym? Ten more clowns skipping down the street in two more parades? By the end of the film, it's really not about what we see, but how we see it. (JZ)

# THE LAST NIGHT (1983)

**Michael J. Murphy**

*The Last Night* is set in reality. It takes place during the final performance of a play at a mid-sized theater. The lead actress is celebrating a birthday. A closing night/birthday party is being held after the show. Two wicked men break in and hide backstage. They terrorize the cast and crew as the performance goes on.

This film was originally released as a co-feature with director Michael Murphy's *Invitation To Hell.* Whereas *Invitation* has a nightmare quality to it, the story of *The Last Night* is pretty straightforward. There are some nice moments of the killers floating around the corners of the play. There is the occasional moment when it goes over the top, such as the implied necrophilia scene, and the closing moments have a bit of a kick to them. But this movie is set more in the real world than its co-feature and that hurts it. *Invitation* takes place at a secluded farmhouse where the Devil won't let the inhabitants leave. It is a great, gory, good time. The normal world (more or less) of *The Last Night* can't help but suffer in comparison.




Luckily, Mr. Murphy has one hell of a weird trick up his sleeve. The film is shot at the wrong speed. And the dialog is dubbed at the correct speed. So, the movement of everyone is slow. It's the opposite of what silent films do. It made me feel like I had been drugged the first time I watched it. It's a curiosity, at first. Watching it

go on and on, it becomes fascinating. The main fascination comes from a general feeling of disbelief at watching an entire short film made like this. And then the whole thing might make you sleepy. Hopefully you don't get sleepy until near the end. "The lugubriousness of *The Last Night* is palpable." How's that for a movie review quote?

If it wasn't at the wrong speed, I think I'd have enjoyed it once and gone on with my life. As it is, I've watched it several times but I have no idea if I like it. It's like listening to an album that critics call the "loudest one ever." Yes, I might listen several times but who knows whether or not I like it. It's too darn loud. I can't shake off the molasses movements of the characters in this film long enough to decide whether or not it's good. That's what keeps me returning. Because I believe that, one day, I will know the worth of this film. (DB)

# THE LAST SLUMBER PARTY (1988)

**Stephen Tyler**

Calling all queerbags! School is out! Summer is here! Three months of non-stop partying begins tonight! Linda's throwing a slumber party. Her friends Chris and Tracy will be there. Tommy, Scott and Billy will sneak in. Booze, homophobic slurs, and a crazy man with a scalpel will also sneak in. Plus: "Heavy Metal Soundtrack by FIRSTRYKE."

Dr. Clifford Sickler has scheduled a lobotomy for a maniac. The maniac escapes before the procedure and makes a beeline for Dr. Sickler's house. The house is decorated with velour wallpaper and a Sesame Street poster. Linda is Dr. Sickler's daughter. In other words, let the party begin! The girls are having a kickass time dancing to the z-rated heavy metal of Firstryke and getting high and drunk. Whenever someone gets pissed, the terms "faggot", "homo" and "queerbag" make the rounds. Tracy says, "Let's munch out!" in reference to food, not muff-diving. Chris needs "a fucking Valium." There is a very deliberate reference to Shelley Hack. Then the guys sneak in through an upstairs window. A nerd named Science follows.

The maniac killer shows up. He spends a good deal of the movie in his favorite hiding spot, which is next to a bed. That's the basic gist. But the basic gist is not what makes this one of the most beautiful trash-horror films in the universe.

Director Stephen Tyler had the will to make a movie. So he assembled some people in a Louisiana house and created *The Last Slumber Party.* But this isn't a "movie" in the typical sense. It's more of a gift of life, one wrapped in endearing incompetence and inexplicable behavior.

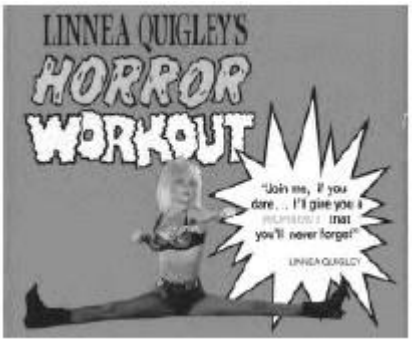
Every minute of this film contains something astounding and/ or off-putting. When the killer slits someone's throat, the scalpel squirts blood. But, the scalpel is constantly misfiring. It sprays in the wrong direction or doesn't start spraying until after the throat has been slit. Sometimes, establishing shots of suburban homes, classrooms, and potted plants have the music of Firstryke playing over them. Firstryke's music sounds like it was recorded by one microphone inside of an empty coffee tin. Dialogue is spoken, but the music makes it undecipherable. Seconds later, the same dialogue is repeated. We still can't hear it. Later, a character will ask another character a question like, "Where can we rustle up some menfolk?" The response is often ten seconds too late. There are also three endings, as if Tyler couldn't choose just one, so he included all of them. And then . . . there's Chris.

Chris is all over this movie. It could be said that she IS this movie. Chris has long red hair and deep, coked-out rings under her eyes. She wears an oversized sports jersey of unknown origin. All of the film's insults ("You fucking homos!") are said by Chris. Chris is also the one who takes a shower. A long shower. A shower that seems like it should be erotic but isn't, mostly because there's no nudity. By the end of the movie, Chris is fighting the killer and we're screaming at the top of our lungs for her to win. Or, at the very least, for her to stare into the camera and brush her hair, which is a signature move.

If *The Last Slumber Party* were merely a cheap slasher starring Chris, we'd probably still enjoy it. But we wouldn't be gushing. The source of our love lies not only in Chris and the general sense of confusion, but also in its technical "flair." Everything is wrong. The exact same shot of the killer approaching the camera with a wild look

in his eyes is repeated several times. Film stock with lots of hair and dirt alternates abruptly with SOV footage, which looks like it came from a VCR-to-VCR dub. Synth blips that sound piped in from another movie haphazardly overlap songs from Firstryke's "Just A Nightmare" LP. A newscast is created by superimposing a computer-generated "Channel 4" logo over a still shot of a TV A wall of audio hiss often takes the place of dialogue, songs, or sound effects.

We could go on for ten pages about all of the inept madness that defines *The Last Slumber Party.* Each time we watch it, we find something new. And that's really what it's all about. A movie that makes us forget about everything else in the world for 72 minutes and smile. Stephen Tyler followed his dream and fulfilled it. But rather than getting a law degree or becoming a professional baseball player, he made *The Last Slumber Party.* He also made us very happy. (JZ/DB)




# LINNEA QUIGLEY'S HORROR WORKOUT (1990)

**Hal Kennedy**

"The zombies are aerobicizing; they feel good and everything." – Linnea Quigley

I think we both know what that means. It is time to Zombiecise.

I know not where it comes from; I know not why it is here. Whether its point of origin lies in the center of a black hole or at the bottom of

a filthy Los Angeles swimming pool, *Linnea Quigley's Horror Workout* eschews explanation. After all, "Being the Queen Of Scream isn't as easy as it looks!" Indeed. Linnea, I'm ready. Ready to exalt my meager body (and mind?) to the altar of your workout non-prowess. The Casio batteries are fresh. My *Graduation Day* VHS is close by. Let's get sweaty.

Shot on video. 60 minutes. Feel the burn: Linnea soaps it up in the shower. Linnea speaks into the camera, attempts to crack jokes, and shares clips from her greatest hits *(Assault Of The Party Nerds* and *Vice Academy,* to name two). Linnea tones some ass in a room with shag carpet and a fireplace with stoned voiceovers that even Elvira would reject. Linnea jogs. Linnea leads a group of zombies in a poolside hustle. Linnea shouts "One! Two!" at any given moment, often with no sense of rhythm. Linnea holds a languid, anti-erotic, ass 'n' crotch shot slumber party workout session. Linnea masquerades as a Ronald Reagan slasher. A severed head flies into a toilet. Can I please get some bloopers? Thanxxx, Linnea.

A gaudy smear of nudie-cutie innocence and SOV snickering (think *Death Row Diner), Linnea Quigley's Horror Workout* was intended to be a promotional career booster. That, and a horny spoof of 1980s exercise videos. God only knows if it succeeds on either level. Luckily, God needn't bother entering the conversation. Not when we've got Linnea Quigley, her studded leather underwear, and her frequent masturbation puns. Straddling between hilarity, joylessness, and sympathy for all parties involved, *Horror Workout* is an experience heretofore uncharted in SOV garbage. Glee. Guilt. Bewilderment. Hang onto your conscience – I really think these people were serious.

Forget Alyssa Milano and Traci Lords. In the realm of workout tape train wrecks, there is no other. *Linnea Quigley's Horror Workout* is an unexplainable incident in the halls of SOV freakishness. It's hard to find, impossible to forget, and consistently hysterical, just as long as your fast forward finger is in terrific shape. And it should be, after all that Zombiecisin'. (JZ)

# LONE WOLF (1988)

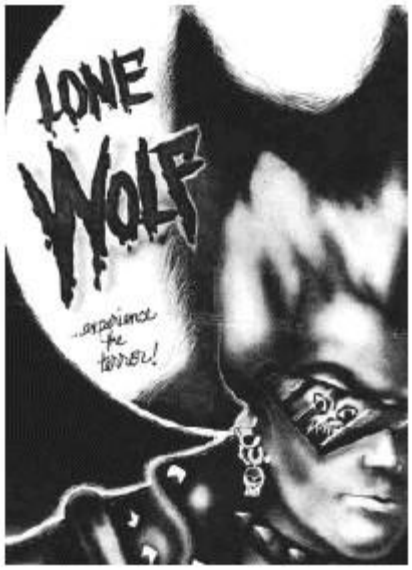
**John Callas**

“DOS: DISK. OPERATING. SYSTEM. Heard of it?” “What a buttface!”

“She probably doesn’t know microfiche from tuna fish!”

It’s true. *Lone Wolf* is the whitest film ever produced in the United States. But don’t let that stop you.

For the next few seconds, I want you to think about Batemans. As in Jason and Justine. Because *Lone Wolf* pilfers the very worst attributes from two very miserable films starring two very awesome Batemans and spits out 97 minutes of glory. So think about the coke-splashed insanity of *Teen Wolf Too.* Think about the burning agony of *Satisfaction.* Then, add a sympathetic girl in a wheelchair, a character named “Punk Boy” (he sports a Lands’ End jacket and a braided tail), and an honest-ta-god reference to Michael J. Fox.




Meet Eddie. “Computer School” student by day. Rocker by night. Eddie might be 36 years old, but we don’t care. College is college and rocking is rocking. Each weekend, Eddie butt-rocks both the

guyliner and the lyrics (“Let it rock! Going out of control! Let it rock!”) while standing perfectly still on a stage with a dangerously low ceiling. Meanwhile, a werewolf coats the suburbs with juicy gore. That’s enough to get me through 97 minutes. But there’s more. While eating french toast, Eddie reveals a checkered past. His parents were killed at some point and now he crashes at his aunt and uncle’s house. Also, a *Breakfast* Club-esque taskforce is formed by a group of students after the werewolf pulls a *Carrie* during a costume ball. I only fell asleep twice.

Before tanking at the hour mark, *Lone Wolf* was a party in my pants. Immensely likable in both its white-washed culture and its choices in non-actors, this is an admirable attempt at producing a legit horror film with $10 and a 16mm camera. It’s not tongue-in-cheek or self-deprecating. Unlike forgettable stuff like *Evil In The Woods, Lone Wolf* won’t kill you. The hair might blind you, but you’ll live. And that’s a good thing. Because that way, you won’t miss out on the rockunroll cliches that were cliched when H.G. Lewis made *Blast Off Girls* in 1967. Or the helpful insights on falling in love in 1988. Or the metaphor concerning computers and the downfall of human interaction in the face of DOS. I’m serious about all of this. I’m also very white. (JZ)

# LONG ISLAND CANNIBAL MASSACRE (1980)

**Nathan Schiff**

At seventeen, I bought a Tascam four-track cassette recorder. My dream was to write and record songs in the style of Nirvana and Weezer. So that’s what I did. Those songs did not change the world.

At seventeen, Nathan Schiff bought a Canon Super 8 camera. His dream was to write, direct, and produce gore films in the style of nothing in particular. So that’s what he did. Those films changed the world.

That’s the difference between most teenagers with a dream and Nathan Schiff.

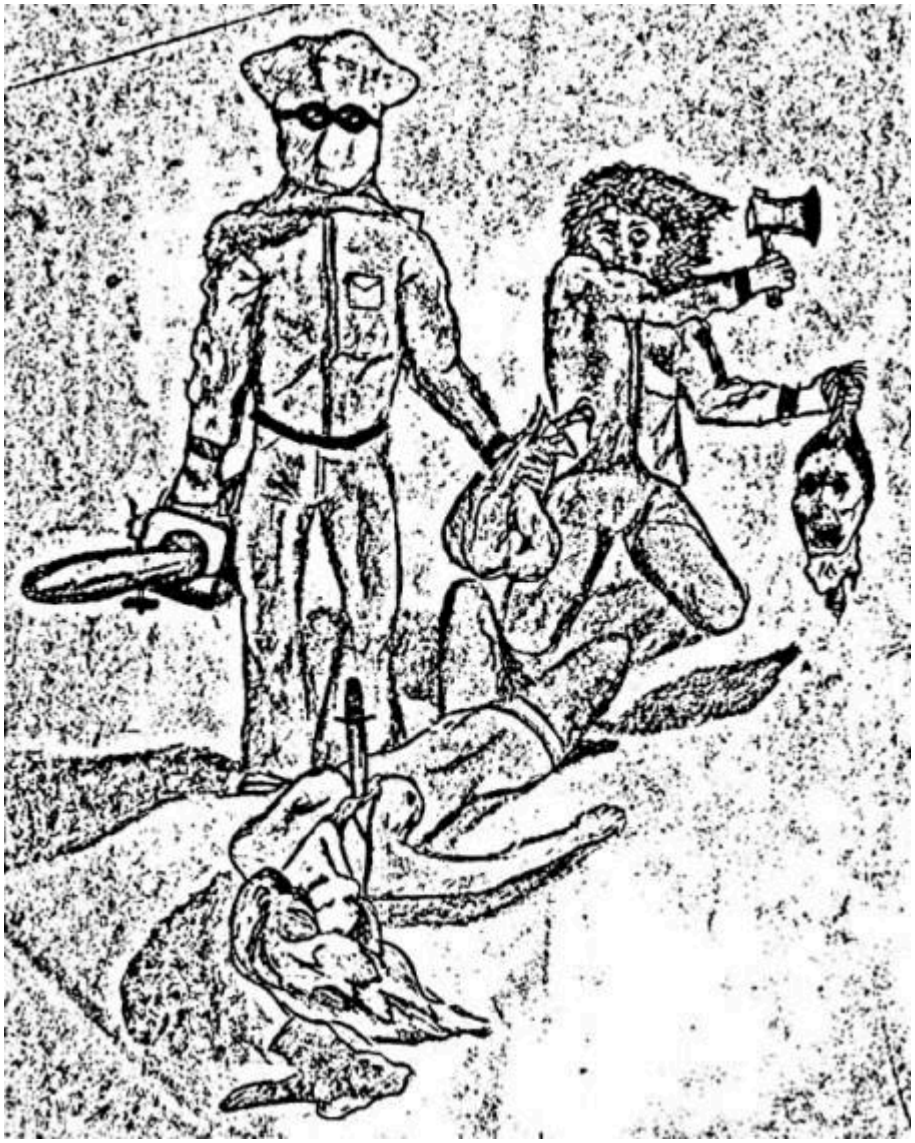
*Long Island Cannibal Massacre* is Schiff's *A Clockwork Orange.* His *Sins Of The Fleshapoids.* His *City Lights.* The second of four films produced on budgets of less than $500, *Long Island* epitomizes the then-teenaged Schiff's ambition. It's also his most balanced, and therefore approachable, movie. Like *Weasels Rip My Flesh* before and *They Don't Cut The Grass Anymore* after, *Long Island* still focuses on people lying in the dirt, talking in living rooms, and tearing off faces. But *Long Island* is more substantial. It isn't burned into my brain because of the outrageous or mundane elements. It's burned into my brain because it brings together intense enthusiasm, dreamy visuals, and people who use corn flakes and peanut butter as special effects.

A girl pulls over on an empty highway. She grabs her textbooks, walks up a beach, enters some woods, and sunbathes in the dirt. The camera hovers and audibly whirs. An orchestral library LP, possibly the same one used by Michael Findlay in the late 1960s, crackles underneath. A man appears. He wears a pillowcase and scuba goggles over his head. The man punches the girl, ties her up, and pushes a lawnmower over her face. The girl's remains are tossed into a garbage bag. Everything looks like it was processed through a roll of expired Polaroid film.

That's the first ten minutes. That's also a summation of Nathan Schiff's entire filmography.

From there, we follow Long Island's version of Dirty Harry (Trans Am, Magnum, "We're in for one hellluva apocalypse!") as he investigates the murder. We meet a mustached man with a Jew-fro, two killers (Bruce, who wears the pillowcase, and Zed, a dead ringer for Roger Watkins in *Last House On Dead End Street),* and some cannibals. Cars pull over a lot. People wear rabbit fur coats and badass Nikes and recite overwrought dialogue in thick Long Island accents ("Thou art my only son!"). Bruce and Zed maim everyone with knives, a lawnmower, a katana, a pickaxe, a cinder block, and their bare hands. Gore appears to be a combination of water balloons and tripe. A very dangerous looking chainsaw battle ensues, but only

after the cannibal leader rapes a woman. He speaks with a pitch-shifted voice that lands somewhere between Fozzie Bear and Yoda. His head looks like a decomposed watermelon.



If you watch this movie enough, it starts to make sense. That fact is negligible. *Long Island* taps directly into the eyes, ears, and heart of a teenager with a movie camera. But instead of finding out what *Star Wars* or *Enter The Dragon* might have looked like if they were filmed in his parents' backyard, Schiff did his own thing. That's what makes this film so engaging. There's no filter. It's like an eleventh grader's R-rated sketchbook come to life. And unlike films that were helmed by teens prior to Schiff's work, like *The Varrow Mission* and *The Milpitas Monster, Long Island* doesn't require much effort to be appreciated. Characters might spend time hanging out on boats, but two minutes later, a man has a very heated argument with a garbage bag that is filled with body parts.

On the simplest of terms, cinema vérité is someone turning on a camera and capturing what happens. Some of what happens might be predetermined, especially in terms of narrative, to ensure a reaction. Most of it is not. It's a technique that's meant to be raw, honest, and urgent. Films like Barbara Loden's *Wanda* or Joel DeMott and Jeff Kreines' *Seventeen* are perfect examples. But cinema vérité isn't always so high-class. In fact, nearly every independent SOV or Super 8 trash-horror film could fall under this umbrella. Those films are just people letting a camera run while a bunch of insane and ridiculous shit happens. Intentional or not, there's no room for proper editing techniques, actors, or scripts.

*Long Island* isn't like that. This is an actual film that Schiff carefully conceived with friends Fred Borges and John Smihula. You don't get the sense that they were just pointing the camera, grabbing random ideas, and shaping it to support the plot. This movie has people actually trying to act. They rarely succeed, but nothing feels improvised. Sets may be from someone's sister's bedroom and someone's grandpa's garage, but these locations were thought out and intentional. This was Schiff's dream. There was no hope of financial gain, as his teenage brain wasn't thinking that far ahead. It's all hard work and pure excitement. And that's what makes *Long Island* even more impressive.

Teenagers don't have enough life experience to create a narrative film that makes sense. But they have sincerity. Nathan Schiff was really sincere when he was exploring the life of a son who is trying to keep his father alive by feeding him a steady supply of humans. *Long Island* is defined by that, as much as it's defined by overexposed film stock, surreal flashbacks, and beautiful sunsets. (JZ)

# LUNCH MEAT (1986)

**Kirk Alex**

The VHS cover of *Lunch Meat* features a large, blood-soaked man with a rope around his neck. The man is holding a severed arm. His mouth is half open as if he may be about to snack on the limb. A tagline reads: "CAUTION: If decapitations, cannibalism and brutal savage acts of suspense and gore turns your stomach, this film is not for you!!!" The words "Lunch Meat" are scrawled underneath. When you see this cover, some part of your brain obviously stores it away. It's gory. It's sensational.

It's attention grabbing. But, is the sole directorial effort from Kirk Alex worth hunting down and watching?

You bet it is.

The first thought I had when viewing was that the movie felt cheap. Grainy film. A one-man musical score. Lots of wooded locations, which are always cheaper to shoot in than, say, a marzipan plant in downtown Vienna. For me, cheap is good. These signs set off several happy alarms in my brain.

We meet the family, comprised of Dad and his three sons. Two of the sons are mighty greasy and the third, Benny, is mute, very large and very scary. Then, we meet the vacationers. They stop at a restaurant where the family supplies a very popular “meat.” The family sets a trap for the vacationers. And, at the half hour mark, the film becomes a series of chases through the woods that lasts an hour. When the chases end, the movie ends.

Sixty minutes of the vacationers getting chased through the woods sounds like sheer boredom. This isn’t *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre.* That movie had a family of cannibals. One of the family members was a giant mute man. A group of young people were chased around for a long period of time. *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* broke new ground in the American horror film. *Lunch Meat*

moves across ground that has been plowed over so often there's nothing to farm but dirt. Making so much of your film a series of chases is risky. A lot of times a director just can't sustain the tension, action and suspense needed. Many slasher films fade considerably when the Final Girl begins her final run, such as *To All A Good Night* and *Home Sweet Home.* In *Lunch Meat,* the film IS the series of chases and, as it turns out, it's quite good.

Bravo, Kirk Alex! I never thought he would be able to sustain everything but he did. The movie works because there is just enough variation to keep it all interesting. There is constant intercutting between the chases. Folks are wounded but keep on moving. Then they get hurt again. Eventually, people start to die. The suspense is pretty high throughout because the director keeps things moving.

The hyperbole on the VHS box cover may be a bit excessive. But the minute I saw the box, it was stamped in my mind. I knew I would come across a copy one day. Sometimes, the anticipation caused by a VHS cover can top the actual movie within. For example, *Pledge Night* has a great cover. An arm reaches out of a graffiti-covered toilet. It's throwing us the peace sign and holding a banana. The movie within is not so great. *Lunch Meat* has a great cover. The movie within is pretty fine. Effort was made to create a suspenseful evening's entertainment for the average renter. They succeeded. (DB)

# MADHOUSE (1981)
# aka AND WHEN SHE WAS BAD

### Ovidio G. Assonitis

When it comes to slasher films, twin sisters can be trouble. Take *The Initiation* for example. In that movie, Daphne Zuniga plays a nice sorority girl. She has a twin who is a crazy murderer. *Madhouse* works in a similar way. In this film, one twin sister teaches deaf children. The other has a mad dog that she has trained to kill people. This "one is normal, one is a killer" twin dynamic has always seemed

strange to me because my mom and her sister Helen are twins. As far as our family knows, neither of them are crazy. Maybe there will be a final twist at the end of their lives that will turn our worlds around and make us question everything they ever did. Somehow I doubt it.

In *Madhouse,* crazy twin Mary tortured her sister Julia while growing up. The torture involved that very unpleasant dog. Years later, Mary has escaped from Loony Town and comes after Julia on their birthday. Julia just wants to teach her deaf kids. She doesn't want an insane Mary killing all her friends. Who would?

This film teeters around in a melodramatic world where people are violently killed but no one gets terribly upset about it. The loud and bloody killings don't happen in the middle of nowhere. They're mainly committed in a big house that's been converted into huge apartments. But Mary does all of this in the middle of a world that, you would think, might hinder this sort of behavior. I resigned myself to the fact that the reality of *Madhouse* accepts the vanishing of people so easily. Immerse yourself in that fact and it works. Director Assonitis adds just the right touch of sleaze to keep me going. The worry of "How are so many people killed?" isn't a problem within the film. It's a problem within me.

Large stretches of *Madhouse* are reliant on suspense and atmosphere. We know that something's going on. We believe Julia. She is our touchstone. But no one else believes her. Or, if they do, they don't believe her as fully as they should. They think she is overreacting to her sister's escape. But she is clearly frightened. The fact that no one will help her is frustrating. Watching her walking around and worrying brings the film down. We can only wait so long before the movie needs to start wrapping up. *Madhouse* almost goes past that point. Luckily, the end hits before it can get there. (DB)

# MAHAKAAL (1988-1993)

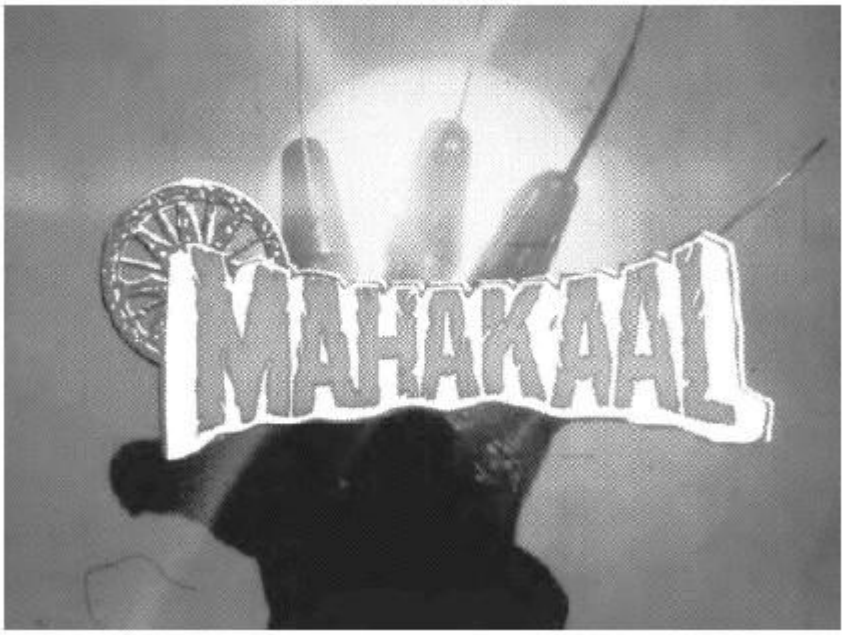
**Shyam and Tulsi Ramsay**

Canteen forever!

Canteen is the name of the comic relief character in this Indian rip-off of *A Nightmare On Elm Street.* He first appears posing under a poster of Michael Jackson's *Bad* album cover. Canteen makes Michael noises. He dances. Everyone feels good when Canteen is around. The portions of this film with Shakaal, the Indian Freddy with a mullet, are pretty good. But give me motherfucking Canteen!

Kids at the local college are being killed in their dreams by some sort of Satanic character with a Freddy glove. It has something to do with Anita's dad and his overzealous police investigations. A woman floats inside a waterbed. A man is killed with snakes. A dozen Freddy gloves burst out of the wall in a *Day Of The Dead* "homage." Canteen beats up a room full of rapists. And a young girl is flung down a well.

The Indian horror films I've seen all look like direct-to-video features from the heartland of America. Films like *The Video Dead* or *Fatal Exposure.* Lots of enthusiasm. Occasional flashes of great imagination. Some impressive moments. Mainly, it's a bunch of awkward actors and situations that replicate other movies. Except the Indian films are generally 45 minutes to an hour longer and they have dance sequences.




*Mahakaal* has at least three musical numbers. None of them are as glorious as the goofball sequences from *Khooni Murdaa,* another *Nightmare* rip that was made at the same time but released first. No man sings while squatted on a toilet seat like in *Khooni.* The *Mahakaal* numbers are a bit more professional. But they still just barely creep past the quality of an impromptu dance number put on by high school kids. I applaud the Indian/Hindu people and their love/insistence upon having these numbers in all of their movies. It is alternately distracting as hell and funny as all get out.

There is a lot of comic relief here. There is a lot of time spent on guys trying to rape random college girls. There are references to Indian cinema of the 1980s. And there are those musical numbers. The creation of atmosphere means little to this film. If you grab a random half hour, here's what will happen. Ten minutes is spent building the story and trying to scare us. Then, there is a ten minute musical number. Then there's an awesome ten minute sequence with Canteen. The scary moments don't resonate because of the constant interruptions from the music and comedy. I feel like I'm in Mumbai flipping through the TV stations and someone edited what I watched into a movie. (DB)

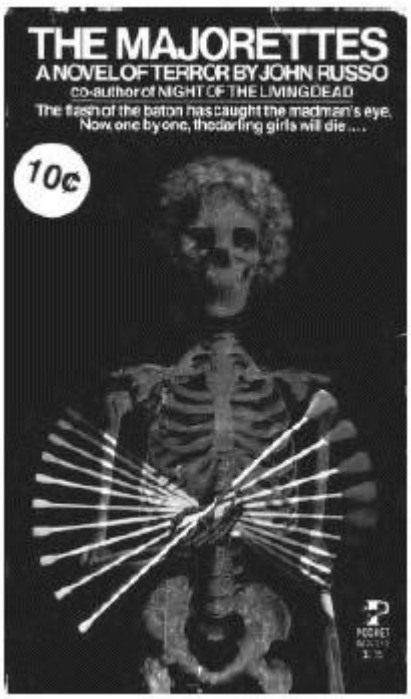
# THE MAJORETTES (1986)
# aka ONE BY ONE

**Bill Hinzman**

We didn't have majorettes at my high school. If we did, they never talked to me. But I did know most of the folks in my class. If we had majorettes, logic states that I must have talked to at least one of them. Why did they never tell me they were majorettes? I could have handled it. If this movie is anything to go by, though, not everyone could.

A man with a knife is killing majorettes in a small town. A "county detective" is teamed up with the local sheriff to find the killer. There is a gang of drug-dealing punks who are causing trouble. There's a nurse and her son who are planning to finagle an inheritance from one of the majorettes. There's a weird looking priest. There's a shootout. There is, in fact, more story in this film than in a half-dozen other horror films from this time. That's because it was based on a novel by John Russo.

A novel needs to have more characters, more incident and stronger plotting than the average movie in order to sustain itself. We rarely see a pulpy novel adapted this closely for the movies. *The Majorettes* seems to be one thing at the beginning, a slasher film. Then, there is a story pile-on and the viewer has to pay attention because they might get lost. Not because the story is nonsensical but because there is a lot going on.


THE MAJORETTES
A NOVEL OF TERROR BY JOHN RUSSO
co-author of NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD
The flash of the baton has caught the madman's eye.
Now one by one, the darling girls will die ....
10¢
POCKET

The film is sleazy, as is the source material. Peeping toms, punks getting high school girls pregnant, and the closing shot of the killer watching little majorettes-in-training are a few examples. But the film is shot in a very bland way. The camera points at the action as the actors do their thing. Some of them are good, like the cops and a few of the students. Some of them are not. The nurse and her son are either super hams or simply goofing around. Possibly with so much going on, director Hinzman decided to keep the mise-en-scene as straightforward as possible.

It was on a second viewing that I realized what the film reminded me of. It looks like a shot-on-film version of a daytime soap opera. Imagine this on video with soap opera actors, who have to learn a new script every day. Imagine the slow but shifting plotlines that the soaps have. The film's shift in tone and story from beginning to end resembles a month in the life of a soap opera. It's just that this one is super sleazy with gore and nudity. That's the way I watch it, at least. Either as an actual soap opera or as the movie version of a soap opera that no one on this Earth has ever seen before. It's a movie with an interesting story and some variable acting. But the direction is the lynchpin. In my mind, I need to justify the flatness of it all. I

imagine *The Majorettes* as an Alternate Earth soap opera that ran for 34 years. The movie is an abbreviation of one month's storylines.

I do like to think that the kickass wigged skeleton with the baton on the book cover and movie poster was an idea from our Earth, though. (DB)

# MEMORIAL VALLEY MASSACRE (1988)

**Robert C. Hughes**

A group of campers arrives at Memorial Valley Campsite. The water supply has been sullied by a stuffed animal that's supposed to be a dead dog. A mature, levelheaded discussion ensues.

Fat Biker: "Hey asshole, what are you gonna shower and shave in?"

Buff Biker: "Beer."

It's Memorial Day weekend, so grab life by the crotch. Crack a brewski. Pour it on your head. Find a pair of Magic Johnson Converse high-tops. Hop on a three-wheeler. Hump a deer. Have sex in a tent. Smash a pocketwatch. In other words, rip that shit up. This is *Memorial Valley Massacre* and you only live once.

For the first 30 minutes, writer-director Robert Hughes stuffs this incongruent slasher with severe hilarity. There's Byron, the sissy fat man-child and his ATV. A "comedy" montage scored with keyboard circus bebop. Cameron Mitchell in a Ted Knight-channeling cameo. A killer caveman with black tube socks and a buck-fifty fright wig. Then Byron dies. BIG MISTAKE. For the next 30 minutes, hair-rending boredom ensues. People talk about the caveman under a tarp. Some sex happens. During the final 30 minutes, the caveman seeks to squelch his inner demons. He succeeds.

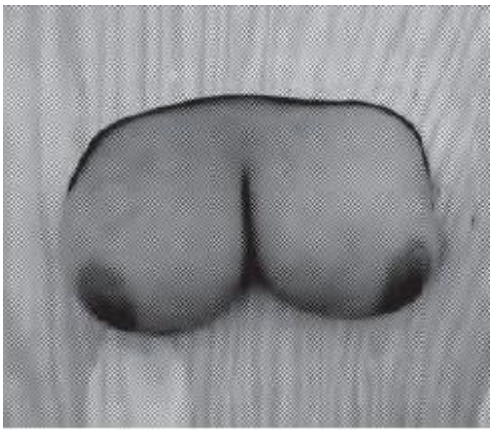
Everybody likes to laugh. Everybody likes to sleep. Some people like super-fake gore. I'm a proud advocate of all three, so *Memorial Valley Massacre* makes it out of the VCR alive. This film forks over

equal amounts of fast-paced hilarity and juicy cartoon violence. It's everything the dorky, "tongue-in-cheek" *Doom Asylum* advertised, but failed miserably on delivering. Here, comedy is not the means to an end. It's just along for the ride. The filmmakers know it. The dragging, uneventful mid-section eventually dampens the party, but it's hard to criticize a film that births a character like Byron. Watch the caveman's shed destruction scene and see if you disagree. (JZ)

# MICROWAVE MASSACRE (1983)

**Wayne Berwick**

*Microwave Massacre* is 75 minutes of people gorging on food and sex. After watching it, I'm neither hungry nor horny.



Piss-stained couches! Enormous breasts! Old Tupperware! More dick jokes than a junior high sleepover! *Microwave* is a beyond-gutter-level T&A comedy with some H.G. Lewis-styled mannequin gore thrown in. It's even less entertaining than *Splitz* or *Cave Girl.* The gigantic microwave, which actually just sits there and doesn't do anything, was almost hilarious. Jackie Vernon, the exhausted Jewish comedian who plays the lead, was not.

A girl pops her boobs through a construction site fence. Away we go! Jackie Vernon wears a hard hat, practices his Oliver Hardy "slow burn face" into the camera, and holds a simmering hate for his beastly wife, May. She says, "You're a walking contraceptive!" After a few rounds at Mr. Chester's Bar, Jackie bludgeons May with a

pepper grinder and delves into a Freudian fantasy land. Hookers, beware! Jackie's libido is working in tandem with his appetite. This means that he picks up prostitutes and kills them with food-related delight. It also means some cannibalism and bigger and better tits. Wonderful! But there are also many excruciating jokes, the kind that wouldn't feel out of place in an episode of Sid & Marty Krofft's *Far Out Space Nuts.*

*Microwave Massacre* lies somewhere between the dispirited comedy of *I Was A Teenage Zombie* and the broom closet production of *Gore-Met Zombie Chef From Hell.* It's good for the laughable early 80s nostalgia (microwave technology, tacky home decorating, half-assed rubber gore effects) but not much else. The main problem lies with the film's miserable atmosphere. Jackie Vernon is about two minutes away from triple bypass surgery. He looks awful. The sight gags are incredibly stupid, but not funny. For instance, a nude woman is slathered in mayonnaise and placed under a giant piece of foam bread. It's a great gag in concept, but the nude woman in question looks like she's having her toenails ripped off. In fact, every woman appearing in this film seems to be squirming out of the camera's lingering eye and Jackie's groping hands. I cannot blame them. (JZ)

# MIDNIGHT (1981)

**John Russo**

Thanks to *Midnight,* a movie based on John Russo's novel of the same name, I have come up with a new movie reviewer term. The term is "donut movie." It's a movie with a hole in the middle. A movie that may be successful in many ways but is missing something at its center. *Midnight* is a donut movie about a young woman named Nancy getting kidnapped by Satanists in the deep woods of Pennsylvania. They put her in a cage, awaiting sacrifice. She prays a lot.

How did Nancy end up in a cage? Well, her police officer stepdad tried to rape her. This caused Nancy to run away from home.

Eventually, she ends up in the cage. By the end, everyone is dead except for her. There were long stretches of the movie when Nancy was absent. When she reappeared, I kept thinking, “Who is that? Oh, right. That’s the leading lady.” We spend time with two guys in a van who pick Nancy up. We spend a lot of time with the cop stepdad. We spend time with random members of the cult. None of them register, except for the stepdad. He’s a big guy who draws attention to himself in a way that the others don’t. He’s not the lead, though. That’s Nancy.

I like the basic story of *Midnight.* I love the wooded locations. I like the fact that it’s not exactly like the slasher films of the time. I never got really excited while watching the film. It was like I was witnessing some high school friends doing a backyard reenactment of a pulp novel. Things happened but there was nothing to it.

The problem lies in the fact that Nancy, who is meant to be the emotional center, is just not there for us. Her character is the missing donut hole in this donut movie. I kept hoping that I would empathize with her plight. I never did. When she’s in the cage, she is constantly praying. If I was stuck in a cage next to her, all I’d be thinking is, “Just my luck. I’m being held captive in a cage. I’m awaiting ritual sacrifice. And the broad next to me won’t stop praying.” I’m glad I watched the movie so I could see how it compared to the novel. Next time, I’ll just read the novel. (DB)

# MIDNIGHT INTRUDERS (1987)

**Gary Graver**

Sex. Airplanes. Airplanes. Sex. You know you want it.

Before passing in 2006, Gary Graver sought to prove that a common line could be drawn between hardcore pornography, Orson Welles, and the film *Trick Or Treats.* So, draw he did. Upon exhausting a 40 year supply of Pink Pearls and charcoal pencils, G.G. was left with two entities. One, a bunch of sketches with titles such as *Flesh And Boner, Orson Welles’ Magic Show,* and *Party Camp.* And two, the

film *Midnight Intruders. Midnight Intruders!* It's the pits! Thankfully, we're able to assess the situation correctly. Sex? Airplanes? Moog vortexes? Whip it out.

Wall murals, planes, upside-down shots, and a whole lot of humping: five minutes down. Mr. Alan Savage slams a bathroom door four times in a row through the magic of jump edits. Out-of-tune folk-rock accompanies Alan and his wife to the airport. He says, "Did you press my grey coat?" No one answers. Two minutes later, he says, "THAT'S JUST BULLSHIT." Mrs. Alan

Savage calls a guy involved in a three-way and talks dirty. Then, he stops by and they do it everywhere. In the sauna. Up against the wall murals. On the Wurlitzer jukebox. After an unnerv-ingly moist foot massage, Alan returns from the airport. He is not pleased. Death! Destruction! *A Tales From The Quadead Zone* kitchen tussle! Soon enough, a pair of burglars, "The Catman" and "The Catwoman," break in, shoot Mrs. Savage up with heroin, feel her boobs, and meet justice at the hands of the three-way guy. Then, some people (I won't say who) get in a car and fall off a cliff. Finis.

*Midnight Intruders* is non-cinema at a very stimulating apex. It's kind of like Eric Rohmer's disaffected *Suzanne's Career* with a bunch of Michael Findlay degeneracy thrown. Slimy. Explicit. Inexplicable. Since this film is obviously crafted under the influence of remarkable drugs and refuses to follow any sort of coherent path, the audaciousness shines. And that's what keeps you glued. Sure,

Graver's *Trick Or Treats* had lil' Chris Graver and his retarded catch-phrases ("Gotcha, suckah!"), but *Midnight* has detailed instructions on how to fill your body with heroin. No contest.

Gary Graver's penchant for disorderly fiascos hits a peak with the obscenely rare *Midnight Intruders.* It's worth seeing for that reason alone. Plus it only lasts for 58 minutes. In a perfect world, all films would run 58 minutes. Is *Midnight Intruders* a look into the perfect world? Perhaps, Only Gary Graver knew the answer. (JZ)

# MINDKILLER (1987)

**Michael Krueger**

Warren can't score with the chicks and it's driving him nuts. He works in the basement archives of his local library. Not a fun place. It's overrun with dust and information that no one really cares about. One day, Warren discovers an old manuscript on mind control and begins to harness its powers. Finally, he becomes a hit with the ladies. But his mind begins to go very wrong.

When this tape began, the screen read "Prism Entertainment & Flash Features present." Prism? This was a co-production by one of the big 80s video distributors? It looks like it was shot-on-video and transferred to film so it began with a bit of a cheap smell to it. My overriding thought was that this couldn't be good. It would probably be very generic horror. The type that a distributor knew would sell with the minimum amount of effort. Imagine my surprise when this starts off as a comedy about an awkward man and his even more awkward friend trying to get some action. And, then it becomes horror as Warren goes mad.

The second half of the film is a gradual slip towards insanity with the last 25-or-so minutes being fit for the horror section. We give a crap about what's happening because we've been made to care about the characters. Possibly, we care more about the secondary characters than about Warren himself. But that's not a problem because our

allegiance to the characters shifts when Warren begins to really lose it.

This is a decent warm-up film. It's never great but it's never less than good, which really surprised me. I get the feeling that anything they made after this could only have benefited from what they've learned here. I respect what they did with this film more than I actually enjoy what they did. I would have looked forward to whatever they did next. My mind reels imagining what Vestron Video might have come up with. (DB)

# MONGREL (1982)

**Robert Burns**

The VHS cover art of *Mongrel* features an oil painting of a Doberman pinscher with three heads. The signature at the bottom reads "3-28-87-GAR." Now you know more than enough about this film, so you can skip watching it.

OK, fine. Here's more: In addition to the painting, the back of the box says, "Vivid nightmares of a frightened man show people dying, bodies ripped apart." Sounds great! Unfortunately, there's no mention of people exploring a house for fifteen minutes. Or the belches that stand in for dog growls during the "vivid nightmares" – which are really just dry ice underneath a bed.

*Mongrel* is the direct-to-video directorial debut from Bob Burns (art director on *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* and *The Hills Have Eyes).* There's a mildly alluring premise (unseen force murdering people in a house). Unfortunately, any suspense is destroyed by a cast whose acting skills are more suited to a local access television show. Kill scenes usually consist of a flashlight, some Hershey's syrup, and a handheld camera. The film does not feature a killer dog, three-headed or otherwise. There is a dog that kind of attacks a person. But the dog is clearly focused on other things, like sitting down. Aside from a *Deep Throat* pinball machine and JFK dartboard,

it’s all pretty mild until the final few minutes. That’s when we get some inexplicable cannibal flavoring.

I wanted three-headed dog puppets, neon gore, and some explosions involving the dog puppets.

I got run-on scenes, mumbling actors, and a *Deep Throat* pinball machine.

I hope GAR was paid well for his or her efforts. (JZ)

# MONSTER DOG (1984)

**Claudio Fragasso**

I like Alice Cooper’s albums from the first half of the 80s. I’d say that again if pushed. But I don’t really like Alice’s movie, *Monster Dog.* Even if it is a werewolf movie. And I love werewolf movies.

CONTINENTAL MOTION PICTURES INC. PRESENTS
HELEN SARLUI PRESENTS
SHOOTING IN APRIL
MONSTER DOG
Cast JOHN RUSSEL - JASON LEE
Screenplay CLYDE ANDERSON Production CROWN FILMS Director CLYDE ANDERSON Music CHARLES KELLIN

Alice plays Vincent Raven, “the biggest rock star in the world.” He’s been sent to his family mansion in the middle of nowhere to make a new rock video. He’s brought along his video director/lover, a high-strung actress and three crew members who spend a lot of time laughing at nothing in particular. Mad dogs are loose in the

countryside. There may also be something larger hunting and killing people. It has something to do with a legend in Vincent's family. Twenty years ago, the townspeople killed his father because they believed him to be the "monster dog." I think that means "werewolf" and I think it might be Vincent.

The Raven family mansion seems to be adjacent to the moors of *An American Werewolf In London* or the woods of *The Wolf Man.* There is a lot of fog and those mad dogs. Almost no people. A posse wanders around with guns. Alice Cooper walks through it all with very little affecting him. He never looks like he's giving too much. It might even be a life-sized robot of Alice for all I know. His voice has been dubbed by someone else. That makes Alice's performance even more distant.

We only hear Alice's voice in two songs. "Identity Crises" and "See Me In The Mirror" aren't the best songs he sang in the 80s. That honor would belong to "Thrill My Gorilla." The songs here are lackluster. The arrangements don't have much life. The filmmakers shoot themselves in the foot by prefacing the making of the "See Me In The Mirror" video with some very good music. At first, I thought they were using Goblin's music. It's actually music from The Alan Parsons Project album *Tales Of Mystery And Imagination.* Then we get the Vincent Raven song and it feels anemic. This is the new song by the "biggest rock and roll star in the world"? I remember 1984. The music was better than this.

When the posse and Vincent hunt each other through the mansion, the synths swirl around in circles, lazily and dreamily. A lot of the film feels like that music. It makes me think that no one was actually awake during the production. This is the first film ever made where the entire crew was sound asleep. "Don't wake him! He's shooting a mad dog attack!" That could be why they never nail down exactly what's happening in the movie. Is Vincent under a family curse? Is he a werewolf? Is it just mad dogs? The film somehow keeps wriggling away from answering questions that should be integral.

Alice resisted metal throughout the first half of the 80s. He resisted the world of horror in much of his music from that time. But, in 1986, he made the heavy metal/hard rock album *Constrictor* and contributed songs for *Jason Lives: Friday The 13th Part 6.* Right before that, he made this. It seems like the filmic equivalent of his albums from the late 70s, like *Lace And Whiskey* and *From The Inside.* Hazy and lost, he was looking for a way to reenter a world he helped create. Eventually, he'd get there. But not with *Monster Dog.* (DB)

# MOON STALKER (1989)
# aka CAMPER STAMPER

**Michael O'Rourke**

My dad used to do some crazy shit. One Saturday, he tore up the front lawn of our house on what seemed like a whim. I believe he called it "reaping." The whole lawn was a mess of dirt, which he would reseed. It gave the crazy old man who lived next door a heart attack. The crazy man's even crazier son came over that night and killed us all. To his dying breath, my dad stood by the "reaping" technique. I was no longer convinced or alive. OK, some of that story was lie. When a dad gets an idea in his head, however, it can lead to the darnedest stuff happening. It was seeing the slightly odd behavior of the dad in *Moon Stalker* that brought this story back to my mind.

After a pre-credit kill, *Moon Stalker* follows a family of four camping in the middle of winter. It is cold and there is snow on the ground. The mom and the kids hate it. The dad loves it to pieces. An old camper pulls up next to theirs. A crazy man chats with the family. That night, the man dies. His crazier son breaks out of his camper confines and kills the family. I'd bet the dad never gave up on his winter camping idea.

The nutty son then infiltrates a winter training session for camp counselors. After the time spent with the family, the movie doesn't

have much time left for him to kill all the counselors. He speeds through them pretty quickly. We don't get a chance to really meet anyone. There is an army guy and his girlfriend who run the training. There are several other characters who I couldn't remember if my life depended on it. The movie keeps up a decent pace by shifting from the family to the counselors. It's one thing to be inside a house in the snow, like *Iced.* To be actually camping out in the cold is another sort of adventure. You're out in the wild. There's nowhere to hide from the killer because you're both in the same place, as it were. No locking the killer out. This crazy guy is here with you. Although we don't spend a lot of time at this camp, we still get the moody feeling of isolation from being outside in this weather.

Director Michael O'Rourke also made *Deadly Love.* It is structured like *Moon Stalker.* There is a long opening section before the main bulk of the movie. I wonder why both of his films do this? It's atypical of most slashers. The average slasher begins with an opening kill and then goes right into the movie. O'Rourke may have felt that the basic premise couldn't sustain a full film so he added extra sections to the film. Or maybe that was just the way he wrote.

*Moon Stalker* is professionally made and well acted. The story wrapped around the killings is as old as the hills. The snow and the structure are what make this film stick in my mind. I close my eyes and I'm in a tent in the snow. The point of camping is to be outside. You spend as little time as possible in the tent. But, at this camp, wouldn't you want to spend most of your time in the tent? Would it be easier or harder for the killer to get you? It would be easier because he knows where you are. It would be harder because it's tougher for him to hide. Personally, I never want to find out. I'd welcome any reader to recreate this scenario on their own and tell me about it. (DB)

# MOVIE HOUSE MASSACRE (1984) aka BLOOD THEATRE

**Rick Sloane**

More often than not, explanation is sought for life's conundrums. More often than not, these puzzles can be solved with a shrug of the shoulders and a "Boy, people are funny sometimes." They sure are.

Ticket sales are down. Dumb looks are through the roof. Welcome to Spotlite Theatres! *Movie House Massacre,* the debut film from director Rick Sloane *(Hobgoblins; Vice Academy),* fills 75 minutes with a whole lot of nothing. It's a zero budget, goof-off slasher that prefers the horror-comedy company of *Student Bodies* (a success) over *Doom Asylum* (a failure). Yet, it remains a loner at heart.

A theater usher burns a film canister, then murders the ticket teller. Soon after, a sign reads, "$25,000 Reward To Anyone Willing To Open This Theatre." Dean Murdoch, head of Spotlite Theatres (he has white face make-up, even though he's white), enlists the help of his secretary (Mary Woronov from *Rock 'n' Roll High School)* to reopen the theater. What follows will cut you like a knife. And you'll love it. A grandpa slasher. The one-man Casiotone soundtrack. Vacuuming scenes. The world's worst cheerleaders. Gore effects that could pass for cherry yogurt with fruit at the bottom. A sound effect of a Roman candle exploding appearing at random throughout the movie. A magnificent fake trailer titled *The Clown Whores Of Hollywood.* And finally, the most horribly inept fight scene since Peter Goldson swept the beach with Greg Rainmaker's ass in *The Stabilizer.*

*Movie House Massacre* may put you to sleep, but that's irrelevant. Nonsense equals entertainment, thanks to the nostalgia of independent early 80s theaters, a self-assured dedication to nonsense, and tons of garage-project charm. The jokes don't work, but the people delivering them do. Then again, are they even "jokes"? Phones exploding into piles of butter. A pair of spandex jeans. Breasts flopping in the dark. Are these things actually comedic? Is this what an afternoon in Rick Sloane's home would feel like? Dare to dream. (JZ)

# MUERTE INFERNAL (1987)

**Ronald Wertheim aka Roberto Guinar**

Everyone has dirty little secrets, yet no one talks about them. No one, that is, except *Muerte Infernal.*

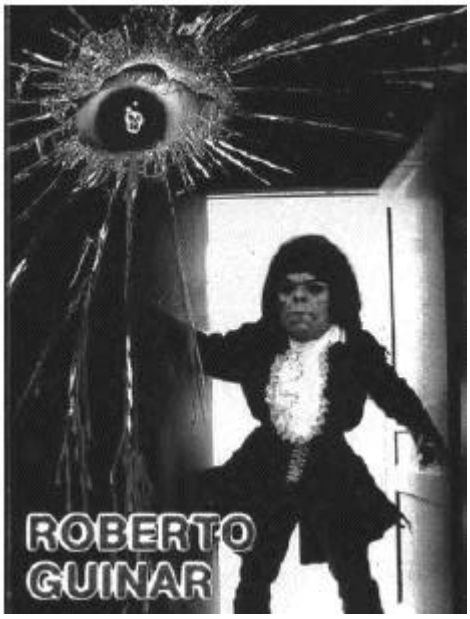
*Muerte Infernal!* The film that uncomfortably announces, “I am not afraid of groping my mom’s boobs and making out with her. I am not afraid of people sitting on beds and talking. And I am most certainly not afraid of a horny midget killer who looks and sounds like a constipated fusion of Rosie O’Donnell and Moe Howard (with clown make-up). By the way, have you seen my Michael Jackson glove?”

If you’re taken aback, it’s only natural. For that is the feeling of raw honesty, firm audacity, and potent hallucinogens having their way with you. This is the essence, the lovely stench, that is *Muerte Infernal.* Birthed in Mexico, yet insusceptible to any known form of human culture, *Muerte* echoes *Al Filo Del Terror*’s proven method of midget-ized success: Visual disruption, forbidden themes, and drop-dead boredom.

Lawrence, a foppish man-child, lives with his busty mother in a quaint shoppe called The House Of Dolls. Lawrence also wears black leotards, enacts private puppet shows, cries a lot, and makes out with his mom. All is well in The House Of Dolls. But then, Larry hears a moaning in the basement. What could it be?! A crate is uncovered. Two eyes peep out. It is Yermo, the midget.

AND HE IS FREE!

Yermo talks, grunts, and makes fart noises in front of a puppet show audience for three full minutes. Everyone leaves. Yermo molests and murders two women, then bangs his fists on a wall. Yermo and Lawrence lie on the floor and cackle while an unrelated sex scene is thrust towards our faces. Yermo laughs at a girl with a small head. Yermo writhes on a bed during an anxiety-ridden temper tantrum. God bless Yermo.




If *Muerte Infernal* were merely a midget slasher with a lot of talking, we'd still be in good shape. But strangeness triumphs even behind the camera. Photography swoops about dank rooms with maniacal, tripped-out spasms. The soundtrack bleeds with the throat of Jonathan Richman and the synths of karaoke country songs. Moans and growls blanket the film's second half. Charlie Chaplin mimicry chimes in for no apparent reason. The song lyrics are in English, but the dialogue is not. Of course, that only makes it better.

Creepy, semi-disturbing, and obviously hysterical, *Muerte Infernal* opens up its conscience for our benefit, yet asks for nothing in return. Be a good sport. Humor Mr. Yermo. The effort will not be made in vain. (JZ)

# MUTILATIONS (1986)

**Larry Thomas**

I saw the title. It was *Mutilations.* I immediately envisioned a man in his early twenties, probably with glasses, sitting in the corner of a cheap room pulling strips of bloody latex off his face. Don't let the title fool you. The mutilations refer to cattle mutilations made by lizard-like aliens. This movie is fun. I don't know where this one

came from and I don't actually care. I am just very glad that it was made.

Somewhere in rural America, an astronomy professor takes some students to a small town where UFOs have been spotted and cattle mutilations have occurred. I hesitate to give more away. I knew nothing about it when I put it on so I'm going to let you enjoy this without too much blab. But, I can promise some cool synths, some variable acting by people who probably aren't actors and some kickass aliens. Ones that are just like the stop motion monsters in *Winterbeast.*

The actors give it their all. The effects crew work overtime. The music plays and plays. At times it seems like the film might be goofing around. There is a scene in a diner where almost every line elicits a dramatic sting from the music, regardless of what they're actually saying. There is a bit too much aimless rambling near the end. The students and the teacher enter some caves, which look cool, but it does feel like time is being bided. Regardless of any off moments, I do love this.

Each scene has a line, a bit of music, an effect, or an actor's performance that feels like it is on the verge of falling apart. The dubbing in the first scene with the professor and students is so loud that you can't pay attention to anything else. The effects are fun but they have a "Have we done this right?" feeling to them. The sets of the cabin and the caves always feel like sets, possibly assembled in someone's garage.

You'd have to be a real jerk to dislike *Mutilations* because it feels like it was made by over-enthusiastic 12-year-olds. The kids don't know what they're doing. Any adults in the area are too proud of their children to point out that things might not be working. The basic energy that the film has coupled with the subject matter AND this awkwardness makes for an experience that will make everyone happy who's willing to give it a chance. (DB)

# THE MUTILATOR (1985)
# aka FALL BREAK

**Buddy Cooper**

Sometimes titles change. That's strange. Take *Class Reunion Massacre* aka *The Redeemer.* The former has punch, but the latter gives us flavor. Which is better? Is *Zombie Holocaust* a more appropriate title than *Doctor Butcher, MD?* I prefer *Butcher,* but that's just the way I am. *Fall Break, a*s a title, isn't as gross as *The Mutilator,* but it promises a rather non-specific thing that can go anywhere. Whereas when the word "mutilator" appears in your title, the rows you can hoe are limited.

Spring Break is big and raucous with boobs and sand. Fall Break implies one last fling before the winter sets in. A good time with friends that involves fires in the fireplace and, in my mind, wind. The theme song of the movie, "Fall Break," in no way implies that it is less of a break than Spring Break. It seems to say that Spring Break is when two people hook up randomly, but Fall Break is when true love appears. Sounds cool to me. I prefer the autumn.

During the opening ten minutes, a little boy kills his mom with a rifle. Dad flips out and sets Mom's body up against the couch while sipping a cocktail. Then, some years later, six college kids are summoned to shutter up Dad's condo for the upcoming Fall Break. But someone – maybe Dad – lives in the garage and chops up the cast with a medieval hatchet. I think. That twenty minute game of Blind Man's Bluff threw things off.

I have always seen the opening sequence as being rather amateurish. A clumsily handled set-up for the clumsily handled plot.

And though I don't retreat from the clumsy part, I think the director's moving towards something else. He's trying for a free-flowing,

*Halloween-style* foundation. There isn't much dialogue. We see moving pictures and read signs and infer things. If it were more artistically handled, the film would resonate. As it stands, the cheap atmospherics and sloppy narrative feel odd.

All of this clumsiness leads to the main portion of the movie. The kid shot his mom – accidentally, yes – but why is it handled so vaguely? Why didn't anyone ever think that the dad would go crazy? Isn't it implied that he already has? Why does he choose Fall Break? Why does the movie try to present itself as a mystery at all? The strange, lazy opening sets the tone for a lazy movie. It's interspersed with several not-so-lazy gore killings such as a woman having a baling hook thrust into her crotch. Or a man getting bisected in a car crash. But those energetic and painful moments are few and far between.

*The Mutilator* is far from being an ideal fifth-rate slasher. It only has energy when there is killing and when the *Hill Street Blues*-meets-Billy Joel theme song is playing. Its plot either assumes that everyone watching is an idiot or we might all be smart but we just don't pay attention. Or we just don't care as long as people are getting gouged in the crotch. Something about that isn't inviting. But the roué of strange plotting, barely sketched characters, bouncy songs, and gory killings makes this one attractive. It's worth a viewing on a fall evening. Or even a Fall Break evening. (DB)

# NAIL GUN MASSACRE (1985)

**Terry Lofton**

The structure of *Nail Gun Massacre* is simplicity itself. We follow random folks through the woods. They're killed by a wisecracking killer with a nail gun. The sheriff and the doctor investigate. It all has something to do with the opening scene, which is an alternately horrific and foolish gang rape scene. All the construction workers involved are victims of the nail gun murderer, plus a lot of random people who are just passing through. The whole thing has the feel of an SOV but it is shot on scrappy film that gives it a nice, grungy feeling.

This movie has a ton of killings and a bunch of gore, lots of nudity and a very good synth score. It also has performers giving it their all, sometimes hilariously. My favorite actor is the charming grocery store checkout lady who seems distracted while delivering her lines as if she really was ringing up groceries, rather than acting. I see the director telling her over and over again that her focus should be on the lines rather than the groceries. She never really gets it because, as far as she's concerned, the groceries and the money would be her character's focus. And, technically, she wouldn't be wrong.

Sometimes you can forget how nutty a film is until you re-watch it. *Nail Gun Massacre* is always out of my mind until I watch it.

Then, when it's over, I'm always ready to watch it again. Hey, it's even got a car chase! When folks try this hard, it shows in the final product. Are there moments of "what the hell!"? Sure. In the end, the killer falls from the gravel pit machine. We see him clumsily fall. We hear him yell and don't see him hit the ground. Then, we see him with his leg bent and he's dead. Really? Did he fall that far and that hard? Budnik, you just got Loftoned!

Hard! (DB)

# NATAS: THE REFLECTION (1983)

**Jack Dunlap**

My mother-in-law was visiting, so we watched *Natas.* She wasn't so thrilled. After about fifteen minutes, she mumbled, "Well, this is kind of slow, isn't it?" After the guy with the mustache complained for the tenth time about going to the desert, she asked, "Why did that guy come along if he hates it so much?" And, the most damning of all:

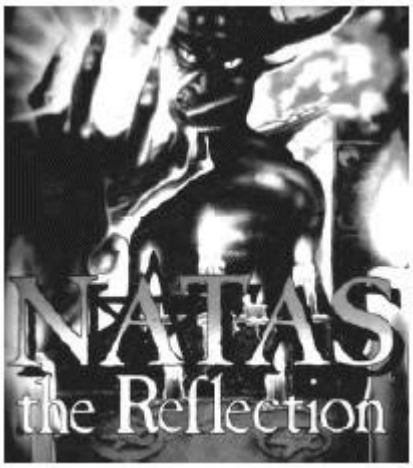
Her: "What is this?"

Me: "What do you mean?"

Her: "Is this supposed to be a horror movie?"

Me: “I’m going to have to get back to you.”

After the film ended, I was able to answer her questions. Is *Natas* slow? Yes, it is kind of slow. Even when the pace picks up, the film is still slow. Why did that complaining man with the mustache come along? No reason is given. He just keeps complaining. And, to the most damning question of all, I answer: It is a horror movie, mostly.




Steve is a man with an obsession. He is on a quest for a 200-year-old Native American named Smohalla. He’s lost his job because of it. Steve’s girlfriend is about to leave him because of it. Then, he finds Smohalla. Together, they must free the souls being held prisoner at Natas Tower before the evil one can claim them! Forever! But before that happens, Steve stumbles upon a ghost town filled with creepy zombies who have bendy, echoed voices. Just when you think the movie might stay there for a while, Steve escapes. Then, he returns with some friends in tow. The ghost town remains but the zombies have vanished. The film morphs into a mini-slasher. Something starts to kill Steve’s friends in a gory fashion. Steve and his girlfriend encounter Natas and, using a mystical mirror, force the evil one to see his reflection. Then there is a final twist that is completely fitting because it is 100% dippy.

Every time *Natas* settles into boredom, it shifts gears and becomes engaging again. For a while. Then it has to jumpstart once more. This forces a viewer to have stamina. And that might require more

effort than *Natas* is worth. For example, there is a scene where Steve and the gang stay overnight at the ghost town saloon. We watch them go up the stairs, slowly, and bunk down in the old bedrooms. After a time, they hear a piano playing. So, the group go down the steps, very slowly, to investigate. For some reason, I found their trip down the steps to be one of the most monotonous sequences of cinema ever. I know the characters are scared. But that doesn't mean we need to see each of them slowly go down each step. Especially considering we just watched them go up the same steps. I almost turned the movie off at this point. I'm still not sure if that was the right decision. (DB)

# THE NEW YORK CENTERFOLD MASSACRE (1982-85)

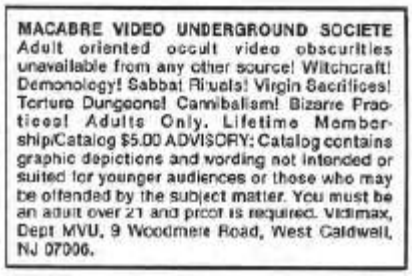
**Louis Ferriol**

*The New York Centerfold Massacre* makes me ask nothing but questions.

It was made by a mail-order company named Vidimax and reconstructed after a warehouse fire destroyed most of the movie. This one is odd, even in the context of all the other movies you've read about. The story of someone killing centerfolds and wanna-be centerfolds goes on for around 40 minutes and is shot on the cheapest of video. The world of this movie consists of a bunch of great NYC girls and an old woman who watches televangelists all the time. On the trail of the killer, we have a psychic named Flavian teamed up with the world's worst cop in a genre that has some of the absolute worst cops in it. It also has some naked gals who seem to have been inserted "from the future." You'll know what I mean when you see them. They look like YouTube videos that got accidentally edited into the fabric of the film.

The problems are legion. The movie is slow, slow, and slow. Everyone is terrible in this. It looks terrible. The plot is terrible. But it is completely fascinating. I can't stop watching the damn thing. The

thought that this SOV was made for mail-order only is an incredible one. I wonder what would have happened if I had ordered this? I wonder if anyone did? The quality of the video mixed with the subject matter and the “point-the-camera” mise-en-scene makes the whole thing viscerally sleazy. These people were all one step away from ending up on the Morton Downey Jr. show. Maybe they were on it. And the killings are done with such a lack of panache. Why make a horror film if no one involved has the ability to scare? Well, frankly, I ask it but then I think, “Who cares?”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The killings have some blood but they are so weird that it doesn’t matter. I’m thinking specifically of the hooded killer shoving a hair dryer in a woman’s mouth. Don’t ask me which woman, though. The main women in the movie became interchangeable as it went along. The grandma and the cop are two of the most annoying characters ever. Occasionally gals take off their clothes and they may or may not get killed. I feel like I’m watching the home movies of a crazy man whenever I put this on. I’m imagining everyone in a large NYC warehouse churning these out. Why not make full length films and try to get them in video stores? Was their mail order niche so large that this was a viable enterprise? It must have been. And that must have been awesome.

The story behind this film is probably fascinating. But, in the end, I think I’ll keep my distance and create my own theories as to why this was made. It is very slow, though. Almost boring slow. How is such a short film so slow? Shouldn’t it be packed with incident? Shouldn’t it have more energy? When will my questions be answered? (DB)

# THE NIGHT BRINGS CHARLIE (1990)

**Tom Logan**

True, the night brings Charlie. But it also brings people wearing sweatpants while drinking Diet Pepsi.

Shot at Universal Studios, Florida, but lacking a cameo from *The Munsters* house, *The Night Brings Charlie* strips it down, off, and out. You could call it a dirt-cheap, “back to basics” slasher. Or you could call it a showcase for ladies who make diarrhea jokes and exclaim, “You’re hot for his balls!” Either way, the film was still shot-on-video and transferred to film for a home video release, just like *Deadly Love.* But *Night* actually makes sense. That is kind of unacceptable.

Charlie drives around in a truck that reads “Charlie’s Tree Service.” He also wears swimming goggles, a knit hat, and a potato sack over his face. No one is alarmed by this. Girls walk by and say, “Hi Charlie!” in broad daylight, as if there’s nothing out of the ordinary about this man. Charlie likes to break into rusty Oldsmobiles and decapitate the teenagers inside. It’s his own private *Night School.* An extended shower and Diet Pepsi drinking scene leads to a toilet-obsessed secretary, which further leads to Charlie’s phone calls with a sheriff. Charlie’s voice sounds like Darth Vader. I mean, A LOT like Darth Vader. Eventually, some cops inspect a barn for ten minutes straight. Twice. As I drifted off to sleep, I heard a guy yell, “Charlie was in ‘Nam with me!”

The similarly themed (and filmed) *Revenge: Blood Cult II* can be an unbearable bore. *The Night Brings Charlie* is tolerable, but not remarkable. Despite the tiresome stretches of nothingness, there’s not much wrong with the film as a whole. The bare essentials are here, along with an expected not-so-twist ending. Rubbery gore flies around. Charlie’s look rips off the Texarkana Phantom from *The Town That Dreaded Sundown.* The lack of distinction might cause drowsiness, but it’s a painless experience. Diet Pepsi still makes me gag. (JZ)

# NIGHT OF TERROR (1986)
# aka ESCAPE FROM THE INSANE ASYLUM

**Felix Girard**

I once ate a slice of concession stand pizza before playing a little league game. This was third grade, maybe fourth. A few minutes later, the game started up and I managed to get a hit. On first base, waiting for my teammate to belt one out, my body tingled. Was it anticipation? Anxiety? Elation? Suddenly, I heard the crack of the bat. I was off! To second base! I ran! I slid!

And I shit my pants.

As expected, the rest of my afternoon, and the ensuing school year, were very uncomfortable. Renee Harmon knows how I felt.

At this point, you're expecting something like, *"Night Of Terror* – the pants-shitter of SOV!" But no. That's not it. Admittedly, this is a challenging film to interpret, let alone sit through. The final written-and-produced film from trash-deity Harmon, *Night* is not fit for the eyes, ears, and mouths of the proletariat; it's too aloof in its disconnection. But, for the few of us who derive pleasure from witnessing just how aloof that disconnection can get, *Night* vies for the throne of The SOV Pits with Nick Millard's *Death Nurse.* Because this film isn't about the act of pants-shitting itself – it's about the uncomfortable emotions which result from that act. And that's an odd circumstance, indeed.

Renee Harmon stares into a mirror and recites in her monosyllabic German accent, “You know, you’re homely. No wonder no one ever loved you.” This follows a ten minute onslaught of overlapping soundtracks, senior-citizen whining, and footage from Renee’s earlier benchmark, *Frozen Scream.* In other words, it’s hilarious. That’s what makes this sudden declaration so alarming. We know it’s part of the flimsy plot, which concerns people escaping an asylum, Renee’s haunted visions, and a group of partying teens. But in this scene, Renee is so direct. So candid. It’s as if we’re seeing her work through some genuine pain. And she’s choosing to do this within the context of an abstract gutter-slasher with mannerisms that are barely recognizable to human beings. Am I reaching too far? Possibly. But so what? Regardless of intent, this stuff is riveting. Uncomfortably riveting. That’s why it’s important.

Throughout the film, Renee is constantly berating herself. She’s ugly. She fears abandonment. She can’t forget the past. She’s terrified of returning to “the loony bin.” All of these doleful observations, which may or may not have a foothold in reality, were made all the more immediate by the aesthetic of video. But at the same time, we’ve got the ridiculous incidentals (Renee’s belongings upon leaving the asylum consist of a suitcase, a pair of roller-skates and two tennis rackets), the extremely foreign techniques (crescendos that lead to nothing, harsh edits that lop off dialogue), and the never-ending

parade of totally sincere weirdos (the gawky poolside synth-pop band were a particular favorite). Laughs. Confusion. Empathy. Unease. It's paradoxical affection.

Within this 90-minutes-that-feels-like-four-days, Renee Harmon has managed to capture a special electricity, one that's unique among the SOV fringes. I mean, who else did this? Who was ballsy enough to even attempt to wade through their personal anxieties, however shallow, via the "art" of SOV horror? Chester Turner with *Black Devil Doll From Hell* and *Tales From The Quadead Zone.* Absolutely. The Polonia brothers with *Splatter Farm.* Possibly, but they were too young to know it. Those films aside, Renee stands alone. That gall is what pushes *Night* towards another, much more fascinating headspace.

Absorbed from a different angle, *Night Of Terror* can be viewed as a tedious SOV fatality with a few laughs, some technical weirdness, and a series of uncomfortable performances. That's fine. If you want to take it that way, you can – you'll have a blast while drifting off to sleep. But life is a lot more rewarding when you shit your pants and learn from it, as opposed to not shitting your pants at all. Trust me. And trust Renee Harmon. (JZ)

# NIGHT OF THE DEMON (1980)

**James C. Wasson**

I'd like to thank the person who added random gore scenes to *Night Of The Demon.* Remove those and you have a standard 70s Bigfoot film about a professor and his students that takes a gruesome turn in the last half hour. Naked ladies, a motorcyclist losing his wiener, Girl Scouts stabbing each other, arms ripped off! These bloody vignettes run parallel with the actual hunt for Bigfoot. They change Bigfoot from a monster protecting his kin to a hilariously sadistic killer.

I love Bigfoot. And anything Bigfoot related. But Bigfoot in popular culture is like shrimp in a pasta dish. The dish has dozens of noodles, lots of sauce, some veggies and bread on the side. Within

all these ingredients, there are a total of maybe seven pieces of shrimp that you have to fish around to find. Waiting for Bigfoot to appear in a Bigfoot film can be like waiting for Lee

Majors to do something bionic on *The Six Million Dollar Man.* It doesn't happen often but the anticipation is enough to carry you through. Bigfoot doesn't really appear at all in some of these films. In *Curse Of Bigfoot,* he appears briefly in the beginning. The rest of the movie features some sort of mummy. It doesn't matter. Bigfoot has a buzz around him that keeps me tuning in.

Professor Nugent and his students have good intentions. They're proto-cryptozoologists looking for Bigfoot. But The Nuge and his helpers are some of the dimmest bulbs around. Watch the scene with the group talking to Crazy Wanda. Wanda lives deep in the woods. She may have had a child with Bigfoot. The expedition visits her house. They have a talk with her. She's non-responsive. Instead of leaving, Nuge and friends hang out in her living room. They talk and act like she's not there. Wanda reacts badly when the students begin to fiddle with some of her belongings. The students are confused by this. If a friend came over and started picking through my drawers saying, "Look at all this old underwear!" as I was sitting right there, you can believe that that person would get a punch.

Stupid, unsympathic characters can pose a problem in any film. Who wants to spend 90 minutes with a bunch of jerks? Luckily, we have the gore scenes to even things out. In *Night Of The Demon,* the typically placid Bigfoot is transformed into a cock-ripping monster. That is awesome. The filmmakers were on the ball. Or maybe the staid world of Bigfoot on film bored them. Or slashers were rising

and gore and random killings were required. Whatever the reason, this film would have been very dull without the gory killings. As it stands, it's still a little dull but fascinating. Does that make it a good movie? No. Does that make it a glorious chapter in the Bigfoot canon? Watch Bigfoot rape Crazy Wanda as her dad looks on in disgust. Then get back to me. (DB)

# NIGHT RIPPER! (1986)

**Jeff Hathcock**

Do you think her boyfriend will find out? Do you think his fiancee will find out? Do you think this movie will find out?

A little man with a mustache, slight lisp, and large burgundy eyeglasses states, "I was a butcher for five years and now I'm a photographer. Anything can happen." Indeed, this statement is most profound. Anything can happen. And, within the lexicon of SOV trash, it often does. Which is why *Night Ripper!,* a slasher that focuses on the throes of relationships rather than slashing, remains an anomaly. Nothing much happens. Still, my enthusiasm cannot be concealed. Glamour shots of women clad in safari bathing suits tend to have that effect.

Somewhere south of Synth-Pop Heaven and west of Convertible Jaguars (a tough place to find), lives The Ripper and his shiny knife. Yet, while The Ripper stabs his model-victims in the face (freeze frame) and mutilates their bodies (we don't see it), all is not well. Since the characters don't have names, I can only relate the following: Love at first sight is possible, as long as the person you're falling in love with is having her glamour shot taken. Lesbians are very angry. Fiancees cannot be trusted. Finally, when your mistress yells, "This isn't love – this is two sweaty bodies fucking under a flood lamp! AND I'M TIRED OF FLOOD LAMPS!" she could benefit from a good slap or two. P.S. There is a showdown in a mannequin factory.

Steering clear of the misogyny found in director Jeff Hathcock's other "hits" *(Fertilize The Blaspheming Bombshell; Victims!), Night Ripper!* makes it out of the VCR alive. Of course, there's no shortage of weirdos. The film essentially boils down to a handful of colorful characters, their sometimes amusing dialogues, and the most hilariously convoluted slasher motive since *Hospital Massacre.* Bathtubs are scummy. Overhead lights buzz. The brief gore bits reside somewhere between the tame knife killings in *Blood Cult* and the full-on body violations in *Cannibal Campout.* Throw in the killer's silk mask, about 1.5 seconds of The Beatles' "If I Fell," and a ton of driving padding, and you'll eventually fall asleep. Unless there's a flood lamp in close proximity. (JZ)

# NIGHT SHADOW (1989)

**Randolph Cohlan**

The Lazy Guys Club, Inc. is now accepting applicants. Check out these benefits:

- If you are a man who appreciates crop-top t-shirts, TLGC offers an option that says, “Life Is Hard, Then You Die,” as well as one that features the official “Lazy Guys Club, Inc.” logo.

- If you are an Asian karate expert with a rat-tail mullet and Freddy Krueger gloves (who isn’t?), you will surely rise in the ranks.

- If you yell “CHIP PATROL!,” someone will stuff a bag of Ruffles directly in your mouth.

The Lazy Guys Club, Inc. is a group of Lazy Guys that hang out and fight a werewolf in *Night Shadow.* They’re also one of the most exciting things about the movie. In fact, they’re probably the only exciting thing. Unlike *The Night Brings Charlie,* another late 80s quickie from Quest Entertainment (“The film production company of Universal Studios, Florida!”), *Night Shadow* was shot on actual film. It looks legit. Given the inclusion of The

Lazy Guys Club and a werewolf, this movie should have entertained me for a very long time. It did not. Even when LIGHTNING was super-imposed over a WEREWOLF’S FACE by an Amiga computer.

*Night Shadow* moves in near real-time and most of the film focuses on inconsequential small talk. There’s not much to describe. A werewolf runs around on the grounds of a motel. The Lazy Guys Club, a bitchy anchorwoman, and a few cops stop the werewolf with an exploding car. Aldo Ray shows up as a traveling salesman. He sells novelty fish items. The entire soundtrack was composed on the worst synthesizers (i.e. ones that sound like trumpets). None of the sound effects matched up during the climactic kung fu battle. All of this is entertaining, but all of this adds up to roughly fifteen minutes of screen time in a 90 minute movie.

I just yelled “CHIP PATROL!” and nothing happened. Big surprise. (JZ)

# NIGHT TERROR (1989)

**Michael Weaver and Paul Howard**

*Night Terror* is an anthology film that consists of three stories with an insane asylum framing sequence. The movie begins with a mental patient's bad dreams. He dreams that a topless, hooded woman cuts his throat. She spreads blood on her boobs. The patient begins staring at other patients. We begin to see the stories of those patients coming to life.

The first tale deals with a man named Rick. Rick has a restrained mullet. He constantly refers to himself as a "cocksmith." A woman cancels a date with him. He calls her a "dyke" before doing some cocaine. Rick winds up at a party filled with a bevy of lovely young ladies. It turns out that Rick is being punished for being a "cocksmith." The young ladies attack him and drive him mad. Rick's character is every sleazy guy I've ever met. When he is invited to this mysterious party, I imagined he would be punished for his arrogance and his bad treatment of women. That is exactly what happened. Rick is amusing as he talks about some broad having a flat ass. The ladies are attractive. But the tale simply ends with Rick's punishment. There's no twist. Nothing.

The second story concerns a real estate developer buying an amusement park. The developer is a jerk like Rick, but with real estate instead of sex. The historical amusement park is going to get torn down. The developer is haunted by a spirit who wants to protect the park. Eventually, the developer receives his comeuppance from a deadly roller coaster. We don't really spend much time with the developer. The story introduces the situation. We meet the guy. He is

a prick. Then he is pestered by the spirit until he dies. As with the first story, the lead character is such an ass that I knew we were moving towards his fate being dealt out to him. Rick, however, is pretty entertaining in his cocaine-fueled sleaziness.

The third story deals with an old man who runs a stuffed animal store. The store is not doing well. The man treats each of the animals as his children, which is bothering his family. Three drug addicts are in a lot of trouble with their pusher. They rob the old man's store and kill him. One of the old man's teddy bears takes its revenge, speaking in cute but violent rhymes the whole time. Once again, revenge is taken upon jerks. All three of the stories tell the exact same type of tale. The teddy bear is a nice touch. Watching it inevitably kill the three men is tiring. The teddy bear makes this story better than the second one. But it's all too repetitive by this point. When the stories end, the inmate from the framing sequences runs around the asylum a bit. Then, he gets killed.

*Night Terror* tries to pull us into the deranged minds of a series of unpleasant men. Unfortunately, it tells more or less the same story three times. It tells them with little energy and no surprises. The anticipation of the inevitable outcome of each of these stories made me antsy. If the sleazy character of Rick hadn't appeared, I would have been sound asleep during the entirety of this movie. Possibly with night terrors of my own. They would have involved watching a dull anthology film for all eternity. (DB)

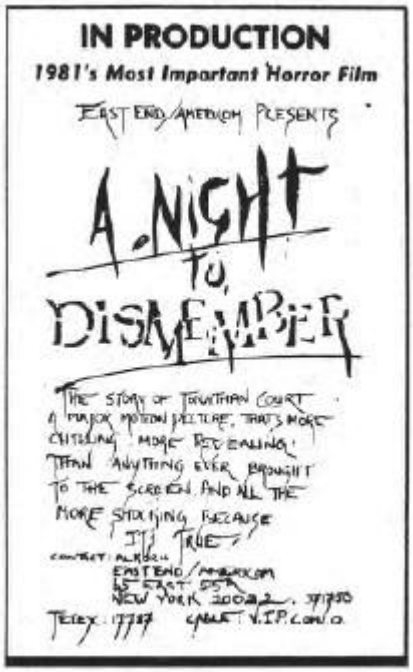
# A NIGHT TO DISMEMBER (1983)

**Doris Wishman**

Doris Wishman's gory experiment in necessity isn't so much a misconstrued slasher as it is a boon to mankind.

In the early 1980s, the horror genre was saturated with cut-rate slasher knock-offs. These were good times. Being the most prolific female exploitation director of all time, Wishman knew a potential moneymaker when she saw it. Attaching her grim, sex-infused take

on cinema vérité to a supernatural slasher template, *A Night To Dismember* was shot in 1982. Then, something happened. A pissed-off lab worker at Movielab destroyed several negatives in a fit of rage. Forty percent of the completed film was lost. Wishman was forced to compensate. For the next eight months, a film was pieced together with bits from other movies, including alternate takes from *The Immoral Three,* and new, on-the-cheap footage. I'll never know the identity of that guy at Movielab, but I owe him a drink. Or three.


IN PRODUCTION
1981's Most Important Horror Film
A NIGHT TO DISMEMBER
THE STORY OF JONATHAN COURT
A MAJOR MOTION PICTURE, THAT'S MORE
CHILLING, MORE REVEALING,
THAN ANYTHING EVER BROUGHT
TO THE SCREEN. AND ALL THE
MORE STARTLING BECAUSE
IT'S TRUE

Vikki Kent (80s porn star Samantha Fox) comes home after a stint in a mental institution. Axe and knife murders happen and there's a lot of gore. Some of it is quite uncomfortable and realistic. Some of it isn't. Story-wise, that's all there is to it. But this is inconsequential to the entire experience of the film itself, which is beyond words.

Did *Psyched By The 4-D Witch* and *.357 Magnum* make you feel like you were sitting on your own head while watching? Amateurs. *A Night To Dismember* ignores the notion of linear storytelling and any semblance of continuity. In doing so, it pretty much forges a genre of its own. Incoherent. Perverted. Exhausting. The pace moves like a bullet, loosely throwing together erratic violence and dreamy visuals with the collage aesthetic of an early Guided By Voices record. Hairstyles change in nearly every scene. Soundtrack cues comprised of Jazzercise schlock, public domain spooks, and wailing 80s shit-rock overlap. Footage repeats itself often. Dialogue is dubbed in the "Wishman Style," which means that we hear voices, but don't see mouths moving. Or we hear voices while the camera focuses on an ashtray. The sounds of doors closing and cars revving are supplied by sound effects LPs or Doris' own mouth. All of the violence is snail-paced and soft, possibly because no one wanted to

hurt themselves with the real knives and axes that were in their hands. As for Wishman's visual trademarks? Save for a few shots, feet are curiously absent, but the tacky, claustrophobic locales remain. She also throws in some random psychedelic sex that looks like it was pulled from an alternate version of *Another Day, Another Man.*

Beyond the sleaze, *A Night To Dismember* is an essential example of resourceful trash filmmaking. And, along with *Double Agent 73,* it's the film that most defines Doris Wishman's career. Her insane shortcuts channel H.G. Lewis' gore and Jonas Mekas' photographic experimentation, and combines them with a childlike naivety. This equals a cinematic experience that trumps most any other. You'll never be bored. (JZ)

# NIGHT TRAIN TO TERROR (1985)

**Phillip Marshak, John Carr & Tom McGowan**

I have always loved anthology films. I get giddy when I sit down to watch one. I like being surprised by what types of stories are told. I appreciate the extra imagination that goes into creating multiple tales within one movie. I have always loved cream puffs. I get giddy when I sit down to eat one. One bite and a delicious mess has begun. The cream gets everywhere. It's on your hands. It's awesome. *Night Train To Terror* is the cream puff of horror anthologies.

The film takes place on a train scheduled to crash at dawn. The passengers are a group of young people who sing and break-dance constantly. In a separate compartment, God and Satan wait for the crash. As they wait, they argue over the fates of three souls. The anthology segments are the evidence and these segments are actually abbreviated feature films.

The first segment, or piece of "evidence," is the case of Henry Billings. It is made up of choice cuts from an unfinished film that was potentially titled *Scream Your Head Off.* It is filled with gory murders and naked women. It has something to do with harvesting body parts

from the insane. There is the occasional moment of plot to make it seem like it's not just gore and nudity. But there is nothing wrong with it being just gore and nudity. When Satan edits together the evidence, as he has here, it feels like something Andreas Schnaas, director of the *Violent Shit* trilogy, might have made. It's a rush of boobs and blood that starts the film off strong.

The second segment, cut down from the movie *The Death Wish Club,* is more idiosyncratic. Medical student Glen sees Greta in a porno and falls in love. He meets her and gets involved with a club of wealthy people who place themselves in death traps for fun. *The Death Wish Club* is not a horror film. It's more like a twisted Hitchcock thriller. The portions of it that we see in *Night Train To Terror* bring out the club element almost exclusively. The shift in tone from the gore-filled insanity of the first one to the weird, but calm, tone of this segment is one of the things I love about anthologies. Every story should put us in a completely different world and leave us wondering what might happen next.

The third segment, cut down from the film *Cataclysm,* is the case of Claire Hansen. The scenes in this segment go through the source film in the proper order. The other two segments cut up the films with no apparent regard for sequence. This is the closest we get to a coherent story. The plot involves Nazis, surgery, the "Devil's Demon" and lots of Cameron Mitchell. There is also a disco song with the refrain "I want it. I want it a lot."

To make an anthology film, a filmmaker must choose to challenge themselves. It's writing a sonnet instead of a regular poem. There are restrictions upon what you can do. An anthology must start and stop several times, telling very different stories that must be satisfying of their own accord. Many times they fall flat and you end up with a very uneven experience. *Night Train To Terror* does not fall flat. The overall feeling is one of breathless insanity and casual genius. All anchored by the calm tones of God loving all of his creations. Even this one. (DB)

# NIGHTBEAST (1982)

**Don Dohler**

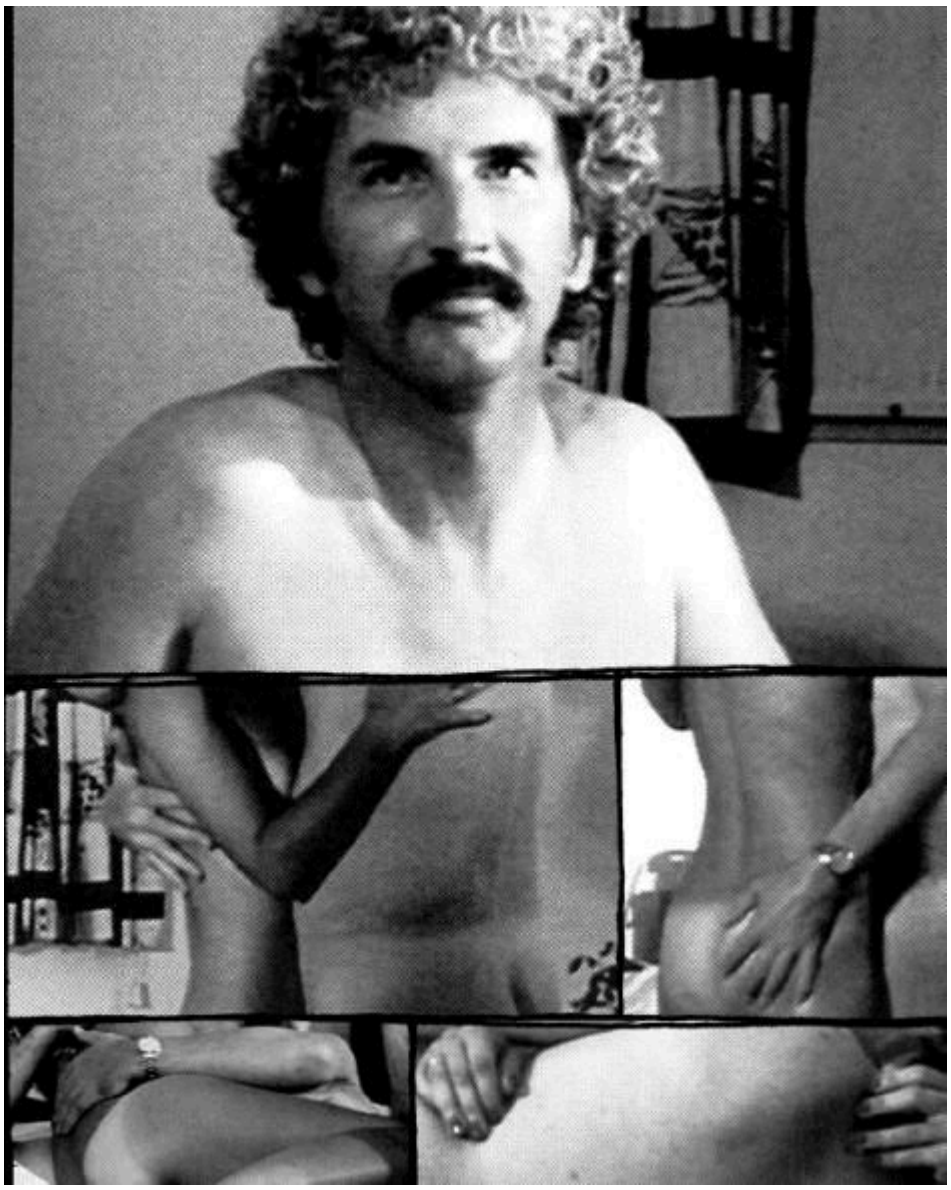
Right now, I'd like you to think about having sex. Savor that thought. After *Nightbeast,* your perception of carnal bliss will be forever destroyed.

In 1982, the late backyard filmmaker/fanzine publisher Don Dohler grew up. Or he regressed. Either way, Dohler adjusted the wearisome-yet-quaint formula of his previous PG hits *(The Alien Factor* and *Fiend)* and made room for the stuff that fills seats. *Nightbeast* follows the trail of an alien monster in a silver tuxedo as it ravages the foggy Baltimore suburbs. There's tons of cheap gore. A few tan-lined boobs. Laser guns. Exquisite pool party padding. And some sex.

Yes, some sex. But this isn't just any old fucking. Ignore what you've learned about awkward carnal relations from Doris Wish-man and Andy Milligan. When Sheriff Jack (Jew-fro; "Can I get this shirt off?") and Deputy Lisa (rat mullet; "Can I get this towel off?") rigidly embrace each other's naked bodies in the middle of chasing the Nightbeast, life will change. You will laugh ferociously. You will turn away. You will eventually break down (it's a long scene). Years from now, your psyche may recover, but that's not guaranteed. Such are the consequences of being

DOHLERIZED.

Is there life after the sex scene? Unquestionably. *Nightbeast* never disappoints. The film retains the regional, no-budget charm of Dohler's previous work and casts. But this one excises the PG-rated monotony and piles on the R-rated sleaze. In doing so, the "sole-alien-on-a-gore-rampage" genre finally finds a champion. *Nightbeast* easily stomps all over *The Being,* kicks *Slithis* in the crotch, and lets off *Biohazard* with an I.O.U. My only regret is that Sheriff Jack and Deputy Lisa don't do it again. (JZ)



# NIGHTMARE (1981)
# aka NIGHTMARES IN A DAMAGED BRAIN

**Romano Scavolini**

The only reason that anyone watches a horror film is to have the living shit scared out of them. We want to see what these movies can give us. *Nightmare* is what they can give us.

In 1982, UK video distributor David Grant served six months in jail for selling the uncut version of *Nightmare.* According to Brewster, Fenton, and Morris's *Shock! Horror!,* this is the only time in history that the distribution of a horror film has led to an incarceration. Think about that. A man went to jail because his government deemed the selling of this motion picture a criminal offense. That's pretty badass. This must mean that *Nightmare* will make *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* feel like *Moonstruck.* It might also mean that a viewing will make you feel like you just murdered a baby. Can an obscure slasher possibly live up to these expectations?

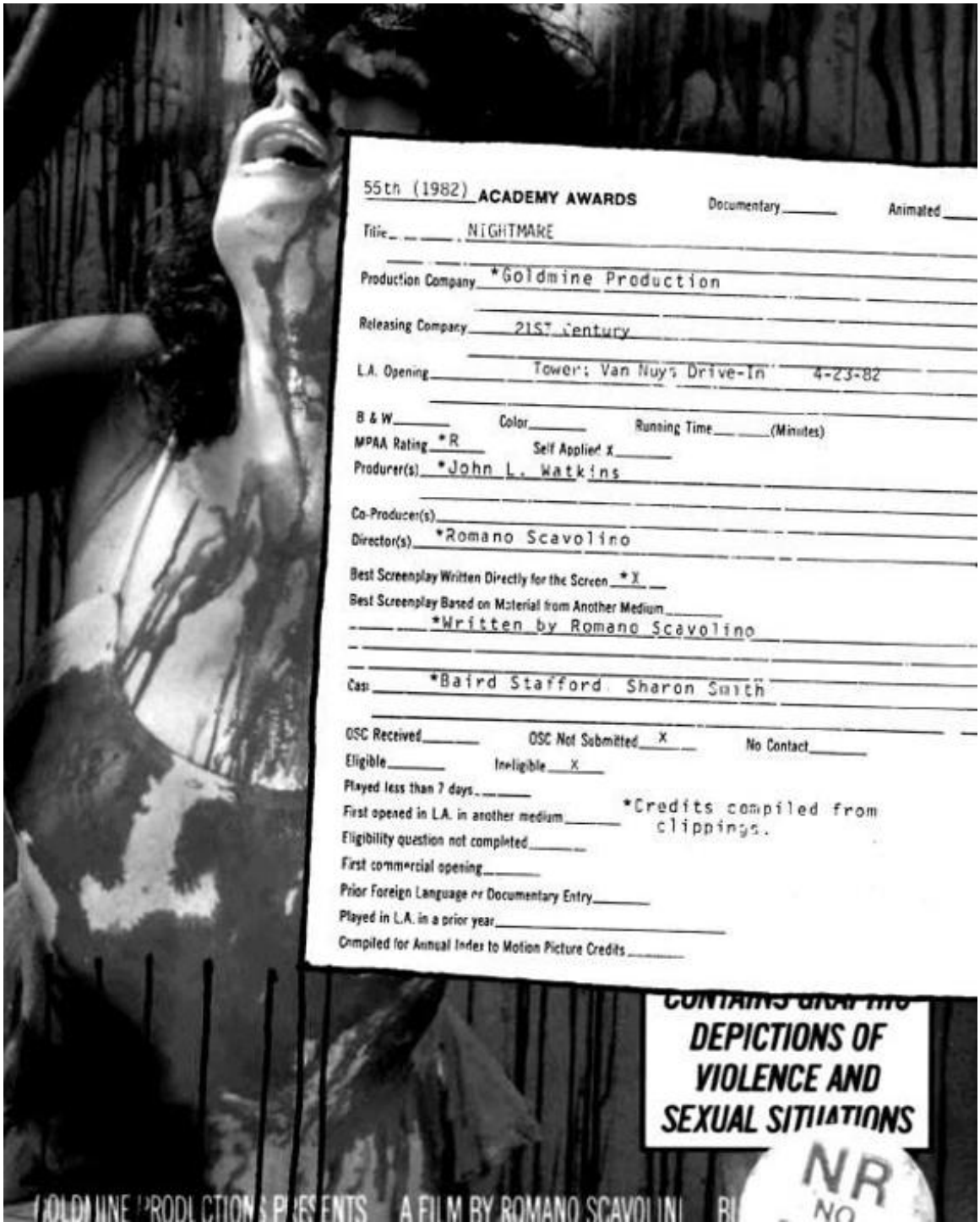
No. But *Nightmare* almost does.

The less you know about the plot, the better. A schizo-OCD-psychopath named George Tatum has been released from an asylum under the guise of a government controlled drug experiment. They say he's cured. A trip to NYC's 42nd Street at its most attractively repellent proves that he's not. George weaves his way towards Orlando, Florida on a blood-caked road trip. A dysfunctional family (Mom to kid: "I hate this fucking house!") may hold the key to his problems. Then again, certain pains of childhood aren't so easily slain.

Ultra-violence and kinky sex are no big deal in the world of trash-horror. From *Night Of The Demon* (Bigfoot rape) to *Mardi Gras Massacre* (full frontal dismemberment), there's a wide range of perversion. *Nightmare* balances it well. First and foremost, the film was made to shock. Ferocious gore scenes (beheadings, gaping holes in various body parts) and sexual snapshots (peep show masturbation, a little kid watching some S&M) take a clear precedent over the community college psychology and meandering plot holes. That's a given. *Patrick Still Lives* does the same thing. However, where most films from this era spin their wheels within those confines, *Nightmare* serves as an exception. It still drags between killings. It still feels far too long. But it can also scare you.

Suburbs. Cartoon pajamas. Woodgrain television sets. A man in a rubber mask carrying a hammer. We've seen it all before. But that's

what we like. We want to see these things over and over until our brains explode. From basement masterpieces to slick studio by-products, these elements (and hundreds more) are what make slashers so attractive. *Nightmare* brings all of this together – the grimness, the familiarity, and the genuine scares. Director Romano Scavolini provides an appropriate atmosphere. Handheld jitters. Haunting soundtrack cues. Dingy houses and colorful locations. Tastes will vary, but the effects cannot be denied. Or shaken. (JZ)




# NIGHTMARE WEEKEND (1986)

**Henri Sala**

This is a movie about computer shenanigans that looks like a European sex film where the hot gals have accidentally wandered into the wrong house, the house filled with the Evil rather than the house filled with the Sexy. A scientist uses a computer system called APACHE to control violence in animals. His assistant, sadly, is the evil part of this equation. She invites a group of young ladies over for the weekend and uses the computer to possess them and their swarthy boyfriends. She's turning them into "neuropaths" and that's not good. At the same time, it's tough to figure out what exactly "neuropaths" are, so it's possibly not all bad. The virginal daughter of the scientist is on the periphery of all this. She accesses APACHE through a goofy hand puppet named George, who has escaped from the hand of Larry Lewis, Shari's crazy twin.

There's a lot of sex. There are groups of people who don't seem like they should be hanging out but definitely are spending time together. A "chauffeur sandwich," which is a bottle of booze between two slices of white bread. There is a kickass pinball machine. And there is the joy and great feeling of personal triumph one can achieve in trying to figure out what's happening in the final 30 seconds. I've owned two copies of this movie and the print they've used is so very dark during the night scenes. But the shots keep cutting, as if someone was convinced that this could all be seen. I can hear people screaming. I can see something that looks a bit vile and then . . . the credits roll. I'd love to know what's happening.

The way the film treats computers is just extra icing on a very sweet cake. In 1986, computers were still nebulous devices. Very few people owned them and the folks that did couldn't do all that much with them. But there was that great feeling of potential. The feeling, especially in movies, that computers could do anything. Anything! You just needed a Whiz Kid or a Science Genius. So in 1986, a movie like *Nightmare Weekend* comes along and it has computers doing all sorts of wild and wonderful things that Merlin the Magician possibly used to do but that no app ever will. Maybe the APACHE technology is from an alien race? If it is, those aliens are doing some

goofy stuff. Metal balls flying around and hiding in women's panties . . . and killing!

After that last sentence, I find I've got nothing more to say. (DB)

# OASIS OF THE ZOMBIES (1981)

**Jesus Franco**

WWII battles. Zombie attacks. Random nudity. Tell your friends. This film's got them.

It also has an old man passing down a secret to his son: a desert filled with gold. A group of "young people" with no discerning character traits between any of them. Music that goes do-do-dooo-do-do over and over again. Jess Franco going zoom crazy.

Sublime dubbing that is completely disconnected from the visuals. Slow, steady pacing that never goes anywhere fast. The funniest penultimate lines in movie history. And, the feeling that no one gives a crap about anything. This sweaty combination of elements make *Oasis Of The Zombies* a true, all-time classic Eurocine experience.

In my mind, this movie had no script. Franco assembled a bunch of folks and said something like, "OK, this letter says your dad is dead. You and your friends feel bad for him." "How bad should we feel? Did we know his dad or – ?" "Knock it off! I've got to finish this by tomorrow and start two more movies by the end of the week!" People assembled together and taking up space on film. *Oasis Of The Zombies* was born.

Somewhere else in my mind, I can see the film being dubbed into English by a group of professionals. "Where's the script?" "No script." "What do we do?" "There's only two of us here and there are about six characters talking at once." "Don't worry about it! It doesn't matter. When you see lips move, throw in a line." "Gotcha!" That is exactly how it feels. Actually, that's how most Eurocine films feel.

I am completely disconnected and groggy whenever I watch this film. It is loaded with endless shots of the desert landscape. People seem to spend eternities staring into the distance. I could be staring at a slide show. I could be watching sand blow across a beach. Oddly enough, I'm watching a flesh-eating zombie movie made by Jess Franco. And it never feels like anything but a Jess Franco movie. There's something to be said for such an individualistic stamp. Just make sure you're near a bed while watching it. (DB)

# OFFERINGS (1989)

**Christopher Reynolds**

Small town movie critic and hat-wearing iconoclast Cyril P. Drathmoor put it best: "I love the movie *Halloween.* But I don't always have the time or patience to sit down and watch it. That's why I love *Offerings.* It's *Halloween* but without all those pesky scares." Never have truer words been said or misquoted.

John Radley is a mute little kid who is taunted mercilessly by the local children. One of them, sweet Gretchen, is kind to John. But her kindness is not enough. An accident, indirectly caused by the mean

kids, turns John into a killer with cannibalistic tendencies. John is placed into an asylum for the remainder of his life. Ten years later, he escapes. He's coming back to town to kill the kids who gave him grief. And he's leaving bits of their bodies for Gretchen as "offerings."

*Offerings* has it all. Well, all that *Halloween* had and more. Prologue and "Ten Years Later" – check. Slow, deliberate electronic score – check. A visit to the killer's old house, which is now in shambles – check. Gretchen answering a question in class that no one else will answer – check. The psycho traveling a great distance to get home – check. If you've seen *Halloween,* you can guess the rest. The more? John Radley eats his mother. The Midwestern kids all speak like valley girls and guys. The offerings are a macabre touch. In one scene, John sneaks a pizza into Gretchen's house with human sausage on it. And let's not forget the other bits of local color, such as the man with the very large mustache in the classroom scene. This is not "in-depth" local color. It's just a great mustache. Or the scene where a Fat Sheriff asks a kid for his name and the kid replies, "BEN DOVER!"

I understand that *Offerings* is rather amateurish. I understand that the entire cast should be included under the credit that reads, "Introducing." Some scenes feel like they should be tense. But instead they flounder on, like when John places a kid's head in a vise. He tries to kill the kid with various broken power tools. Frustrated, John decides to simply tighten the vise until the kid's head bursts. The idea of the killer's first choices for murder weapons failing is amusing. But there was no suspense. I understood the point of the scene, but wished it would end so we could get on to a new one.

Some things that director Christopher Reynolds tries just don't work. For example, the final scene involves John relentlessly going after Gretchen. The Fat Sheriff arrives. Suddenly, the film goes to slow-mo. John walks towards them slowly. The Sheriff steadies his shotgun slowly. The effect of the picture slowing down works for a few moments. Until Gretchen begins yelling, "Shoot him!" in slow-

mo. Action shot in slow-mo can be thrilling. Slowed down dialog always comes off looking foolish.

Regardless of what goes wrong, I can't dislike *Offerings.* I watch it with a smile on my face. It is such a bald-faced rip-off of *Halloween* that the audacity astounds me. There are many variations on Carpenter's seminal film but few of them feel so precisely similar to it. We get the sequences in the mental institution. We get the doctor who warned everyone about John. We get music during the final chase scene that sound almost exactly like the *Halloween* theme. Then, *Offerings* goes ahead and adds a few moments of its own, like the Southern valley girls and the offerings. Those moments feel slightly out of place in a film so slavishly imitating another. I appreciate that they added new elements but it wasn't necessary. The enthusiasm of the plagiarism brings me more than enough joy. (DB)

# OGROFF (1983)
# aka MAD MUTILATOR

**Norbert Moutier aka N.G. Mount**

Truffaut. Godard. Malle. Rohmer. Ogroff.

If you're sharp, you've determined that we're speaking French. And, if you're even sharper, you've recognized five key names in France's magical cinematic revolution. Oui oui, my friend! Now that we've – what's that? You say there's something unsettling about one of the names on that list? One that lacks the approved familiarity of its peers? One that kind of smells like old meat, chainsaw oil, and over-heated synthesizers? Oui oui again! For this is Ogroff. And he has no peers.

*Ogroff* is a slasher perversion from the foothills of France. It's also a benchmark in the halls of accidental, no-fi surrealism caught on Super 8/home video/construction paper. Shot sometime in the early 1980s by director/video shoppe owner/horror zine publisher Norbert Moutier aka N.G. Mount, I've watched *Ogroff* four times in three

years. Each successive viewing brings me closer to the plotless, gore-drenched, gutter-poetic truth. Yet, that truth constantly eludes me. This film shocks me. It makes me laugh. It puts me to sleep. It keeps me guessing. There is no up or down, no left or right. So I keep watching. And it keeps delivering. *Ogroff* is an evil fairy tale from a warped mind. It's comprised of a series of sinister tangents, which only make sense as the whole unfolds, as if escaping from the same sickly-yet-beautiful netherworld as Nirvana's caustic *In Utero.* Needless to say, the experience sticks with you long after viewing. With roughly nine lines of actual dialogue, even.

The first half of *Ogroff* contains no plot to speak of. When the simplistic story arc takes shape, it's a complete surprise. I won't ruin that for you, but there's no harm in conveying the trip we take to get there. Ogroff, clad in his rubber boots, knit cap, and metal mask, sets up house in a shack within a forest. He spends his time viciously attacking anyone that gets too close, destroying property, and masturbating with his pickaxe. He also pops out of car trunks for no apparent reason. After a random chainsaw duel with a lumberjack, Mr. O meets a girl. And that's where the film shifts from mindless ruination to figurative flinching. Suddenly, the whole thing explodes with twists . . . Jess Franco alum Howard Vernon . . . a motorcycle . . . . blinking eyes . . . the undead. Your eyes will be scorched in awe. The ending will leave you wanting more.

The sight of Ogroff hopping his way through the woods is equally eerie and ominous. The crude presentation, capped with the expansive wooded locales, only helps in that respect. As an experience in "horror," *Ogroff* is intense. And effective. N.G. Mount's kinetic stylings run rampant with ripped-off mannerisms from any number of slashers *(The Burning,* most prominently) and trumps them all. On the other hand, Mount's commitment to madness on all visual, technical, and constitutional levels yields iconic trash

perfection, the likes of which are only equalled by fellow idiosyncratics such as Nick Millard,

Doris Wishman and Chester Turner. A soundtrack comprised of bedroom synth-pop, ambient noises, and lifted kung fu sound effects seals it.

Should you agree that the epitome of life-enhancing cinema may lie somewhere between Eric Rohmer's *Moral Tales* and Doris Wishman's *A Night To Dismember,* then Ogroff probably has your number. Besides, nobody destroys a VW Bug with a pickaxe in *My Night At Maud*'s. And that's something worth seeing. (JZ)

# ONE DARK NIGHT (1983)

**Tom McLoughlin**

The official mausoleum survival kit, as outlined by *One Dark Night:* one (1) non-working flashlight, one (1) sleeping bag, twelve (12) purple downers, and one (1) Dottie from *Pee-Wee's Big Adventure.* When do we leave?

Air hockey! Hands that shoot lightning bolts! Toothbrush fetishes! All this can be yours with a single viewing of *One Dark Night.* This is an early 80s snapshot of teen angst (sort of), familial woes (maybe), and stock shots of latex dummies (absolutely YES). It also features a likeable cast, hilariously antiquated dialogue ("He's a kook!"), and a scene at an arcade. This movie almost nails it.

Meg Tilly wants it all. She's got the high school hunk and a beautiful face, but it's not enough. That's where "The Sisters" come in. They're a trio of ladies who torture Meg through an initiation into the club. Just like *Heathers.* But instead of blowing up a school, Meg spends the night in a mausoleum. Concurrently, a subdued Adam West is helping his psychic wife deal with the loss of her psychic father, Raymar, who also happens to be a vampire. In a convenient turn of events, Raymar happens to be resting not-so-peacefully inside the very tomb where Meg is hanging out for the night.

Right off the bat, this film is eager to please. High school dramatics. Foreboding shots of graveyards. Repeated use of the phrase “Nerdle-brain.” And DOTTIE! But the choppy script grates after awhile, jumping around without explanation and leaving stretches where nothing much happens. We don’t need to accompany Meg as she explores the entire mausoleum in near real-time. Fortunately, the tone of the film is so thick with 1980s teen-isms that you can’t help but sit back and smile. (JZ)

# THE ORACLE (1985)

**Roberta Findlay**

All I want for Christmas is the company of a humongous, psychotic lesbian. Yes, I have exotic tastes. So does Roberta Findlay.

In 1985, veteran smut-porn filmmaker Findlay turned over a new leaf. Films such as *LiquidA$$ets* were out. A new regime was in. So, Roberta churned out a handful of ratty, disoriented films that were the 1980s horror equivalent of her 1960s exploitation work with late husband Michael Findlay. Sleazy. Artsy. And, sometimes, extremely boring. This “movement” was kicked off with *The Oracle.* Christmas dreams really do come true.

It’s Christmas Eve. Naturally, the perfect day for moving into a new apartment. While Jennifer and her husband are tied up with that, behemoth lesbo Farkas is busy murdering a prostitute in a scummy NYC sex den (“Lick the knife”). Then Farkas stops for a burger. Meanwhile, Jennifer discovers The Oracle in her new apartment. The Oracle is a ceramic hand which interprets messages from a recent suicide victim. Coincidence? Not likely. Christmas passes. The apartment is supernaturally trashed. Monsters appear. Gore flows sloppily, moistly, and freely. There’s a lot of screaming. Suddenly, it’s New Year’s Eve! Farkas is driving a car on the sidewalk!

Similar to Findlay's later *Prime Evil, The Oracle* masters the art of disorganization. But *Prime Evil* was a confusing mess. I could barely get through it. *The Oracle* is more focused. In turn, my attention span never wavered. How could it? Ad-libbed dialogue, a crackhead plot, shocking violence, booming mustaches, and Farkas. Sweet, sweet Farkas and her expertly pitch-shifted voice. Beautiful. *The Oracle* breathes the same air as Bill Hinzman's semi-entertaining *The Majorettes,* but with more technical proficiency and a dose of New York grime. And better synths. In other words, it's pretty damn good. (JZ)

# OZONE! ATTACK OF THE REDNECK MUTANTS (1986)

**Matt Devlen & Bret McCormick**

"If we lose the ozone layer, we'll all become mutants." Well, there you go.

In 1986, writer-director Bret McCormick and partner Matt Devlen grabbed a Super 8 camera, hit the backyard, and went to town. The results were *Ozone! Attack Of The Redneck Mutants* and

*The Abomination,* two trash-gore films that were shot back-to-back in Texas, edited on video, and subsequently lost in the sands of time. Within months of procuring a copy of *The Abomination,* the elusive *Ozone* quietly crept into my collection. Its sedate arrival could not have been more apt. However, I cannot speak for the red stains,

arresting odors, and structural damage that plagued my apartment in the aftermath.

Things are tough for the hillbillies of Poolville, USA. Coughs. Barfs. Mutations. Murder. The cause? Ozone depletion. It is within this oh-so-very-1986 framework that *Ozone* makes a stand for uncomplicated mayhem. Plot is scarce. Outcome is nil. Basically, tough cookie Arlene and big-time nerd Kevin run, drive, and look around while a few mutated zombies maim the townies. Incidental scenes of redneck character development (shotgun blasting, making out, flossing) are interspersed. A crazed beast appears in a hole, but is soon overshadowed by a questionable stand-up comedy act. And a lunch break in the middle of a zombie apocalypse. Complete with more barfing.

*The Abomination* stands as an inventive, lo-fi trash epic. Its reputation amongst trash film devotees grows with each passing year, even if its rewatchability doesn't. *Ozone* is an afterthought – still focused on repetition, rampant gore, and arbitrary weirdness, but with a lazier attitude. In *Ozone,* the darker themes of *The Abomination* are exchanged for comedy, just as growling synths make way for vaudeville piano rags. But that aside, *Ozone* is still about the extremes. Blood on the walls. Guts on the floors. Vomit on the appliances. Cars and houses destroyed. Faces lost in a sea of black, purple, and yellow muck. The insane level of hands-on havoc is a spectacle in of itself, kind of like *Street Trash.* And that fact, combined with an avoidance of lame adolescent jokes (I'm talking about *Redneck Zombies),* is what makes *Ozone* attractive. Even when it's dead boring. (JZ)

# PHANTOM BROTHER (1988)

**William Szarka**

Oh shit. They're doing it.

Two white trash teens named Richie and Dawn are having sex. He's caressing her bra, which looks like a mechanic's handkerchief. She's

licking his spearhawk mullet, which looks like black licorice with fur. Suddenly, a man with a mask that looks like a giant Oreo cookie slices the bejesus out of Richie. As he died, I was no longer sexually mortified. And all was not lost for *Phantom Brother.*

Richie, Dawn, and two of their friends visit an abandoned house in the middle of the woods. Purpose: maximum horizontal grind. Little do they know that a trio of killers (fat lady, the Oreo slasher, Girl Scout zombie) are hiding out in the house. As the knife falls, one girl gets away. She bumps into a guy named Abel and the movie continues on. Sort of. Abel's family was killed in a car accident. Now he spends his days cleaning up after the killers and sharing their home. Not much happens until a movie crew arrives to shoot some scenes in Abel's house. The filmmakers have a rusted out Winnebago and shitheap VW Bug, so you know that they mean business. Unfortunately for them, so does Abel.

I have a headache for two reasons. One, the cast either screamed or mumbled their lines, which were then recorded with a lapel microphone across the street. Two, *Phantom Brother* is a SOV attempt at horror-comedy, the most irritating subgenre in the history

of film. Don't get me wrong. I laughed until my cheeks hurt, but it wasn't because of lines like, "I spend so much time at the laundromat, I'm starting to call the washing machines by their first names!" It was because of everything else. Why does Abel dress like Burgess Meredith as The Penguin? Is the Oreo-faced slasher trying on a bra for any reason in particular? Why doesn't the horribly awesome theme song ("If I Could," recorded by "Eric" and © 1987) play over every second of this film's soundtrack? Just admire the above average steady-video-cam photography, try to forget about Richie and Dawn, and be grateful that you're not watching *Curse Of The Queerwolf.* (JZ)

# PHANTOM OF THE RITZ (1988)

**Allen Plone**

According to this film, the 1950s had cool fashions (halter tops for guys, paint-splattered blazers for gals, mullets for both) and iconic musicians (Buddy Holly and his Casio key-tar).

*Phantom Of The Ritz* is anti-entertainment.

The film concerns a man's dream of rechristening a 1950s porno theater into a 1950s-themed nightclub. There is vomitous faux-fifties rock and roll. Overuse of the phrase "THE FIFTIES!" A fat "killer" who chokes a plumber, then disappears for 35 minutes. This padded-out disaster appears to be four films hacked into one (comedy, horror, musical, total garbage), with narration that attempts to tie everything together. It fails. This film might also be an assault on nostalgia. Who can tell? I was ready to turn it off at 50 minutes. Then, time suddenly stood still.

Searching for "FIFTIES!"-themed performers, the theater owner, his Shakespeare-quoting bodyguard, and we, the audience, are treated to a cavalcade of "talent" in the form of The Audition Montage. It's the greatest six minutes of life at this moment. Interpretive dance in khaki short-shorts. Key-tars accompanying Roy Orbison. Elvis in a

diaper. Elvis with a mullet. A punk-funk band with Elvis singing. Comedic folk-rap. A New Age clown.

And then, a man performs a rap. He's wearing a Hawaiian shirt and his beard almost connects with his mullet. He uses the zipper on his denim shorts to provide the record scratches. Then he dangles the microphone out of his fly and between his legs in a suggestive manner. He gives us the "thumbs up." Someone says, "It's days like this you realize that life is real!" Puttin' on the shitz. (JZ)

# PIECES OF DARKNESS (1989)

**George Bonilla & J.J. Johnson III**

Tennessee? I've been there. Stayed in a log cabin for a month when I was around eleven years old. The people we stayed with had a trampoline and a toilet outside. Literally, there was a toilet sitting in the corner of their backyard. I don't remember why. If I had met the people who'd made *Pieces of Darkness,* I would have asked if they knew my friends. Then I would have asked if I could help with their movie. I would have wanted to be a part of that. The filmmakers have made a fascinating three story SOV anthology. Each tale looks a little shoddier than the one before it. The acting and storytelling in each becomes worse as it goes. It feels like you're watching three different movies made in different places at different times. But it is all of a piece.

"The Bootmaker" is the first and the longest story. It is the most professional looking of the three, with a *Fatal Images* or *Blue Murder* look to it. The actors are decent. There are multiple locations and attempts at some sort of scope. It begins with a lengthy Vietnam War sequence, including a shootout. It's all about one veteran who wants the wife of another veteran. The actual story seems to have forgotten the twist that these things need. It just sort of reaches an end point and fades out. When you don't know the ending, it's entertaining enough to keep you watching while you try to figure it out.

“Choice Cuts” is more like *The Hackers.* More amateurish. The acting is a little riper. The locations and scope are limited, a few rooms and a butcher shop counter. There is nudity but it feels wrong, like maybe the woman should have saved showing it off for a better story or movie. The twist is obvious but effective. The whole piece feels quite different from “The Bootmaker.” It’s shorter and moves quickly towards the EC Comics-style ending. I enjoyed this more than the first one.

“That’s Showbiz” is a blurry story after the more straightforward narratives of the first two. This one could have been a segment in *Tales From the Quadead Zone 2,* if that film existed. It starts off following a jerk auditioning for a play. The director is a mysterious fellow who is either very theatrical or up to something evil. It feels like it is taking place to my left and I’m only catching moments of it in my peripheral vision. Everyone overacts almost every moment to the point where it could have only been a directorial choice. Occasionally, the camera is pointed at the right spot. But the eyelines are wrong. Sometimes it’s too close. Sometimes the camera is too far away. Sometimes it’s tough to figure out what we’re looking at. And, not too be indelicate, but the people aren’t as attractive as they were in the first two.

Anthology films always interest me. This one is no exception. Watching the segments lower themselves in standard movie quality but improve in weird movie quality was a surprise. This is a great cross section of the various looks that SOV films had in the 80s. The people of Tennessee nailed it. I’m going back to that log cabin of my youth. I’m going to use that toilet today, in their honor. (DB)

# THE PIT (1981)
# aka TEDDY

**Lew Lehman**

When you’re twelve years old, you need to start taking your own baths. I know it’s tough when the librarian wants to take off her

leotard and show you her boobs but it'll be better for everyone in the long run.

*The Pit* is one of the few films I've come across where past criticism turns out to be kind of right. In the beginning, the film feels like an after school special about a kid named Jamie who doesn't have friends and is very smart but never applies himself. The opening scene has a flash-forward where a bigger kid punches him. The music over it is pure 70s-style schmaltz. Then Jamie pushes the kid into a pit and the kid is devoured by a troll of some kind. If this was an after school special, then we would have somehow liked Jamie at some point. It turns out he's just a pervy freak. They forgot the lesson in this one and that's fine with me. I was never a fan of shows that tried to ladle on the morals. The trolls feel a bit like they might be some sort of metaphor. Hey, why not? Jamie is truly screwed up inside and these trolls, along with his talking teddy bear, are his mind's excuse for drastically taking care of his problems.

But the tone and feel of the film are not quite normal. The scenes that solidified for me how askew *The Pit* is occur when the babysitter confronts Jamie for stealing money to buy meat for the trolls. Jamie runs away and the orchestra takes off! The music goes do-do-do-do-do-do! in a lighthearted way. And, then Jamie tries to drag a cow to the pit. From that point, it becomes a horror movie with a lot of off-center set-up. Normally, a kid like Jamie is humiliated or something of that sort. But here it's almost all pervy. Having his babysitter stand in a doorway so he can see through her shirt. Getting that librarian to pull down her leotard. All so grungy feeling until the moment he

sends that first girl into the pit. Then it becomes a goofy movie about feeding his tormentors to monsters.

The dichotomy between the creepy Jamie scenes of the first half and the killing goofballery of the second is one of the most disconcertingly weird things I've seen in a long time. And that's where the previous criticism runs out of steam and gets it wrong. It does start as an after school special. When the killings begin, it swiftly goes right up its own behind, leaving reality behind.

Jamie, you're a weirdo. I would have loved to have seen a movie where you teamed up with Michael from *Burial Ground.* (DB)

# PLEDGE NIGHT (1988)

**Paul Ziller**

The cover of *Pledge Night* depicts a hand rising out of a toilet while clutching a banana. As the opening credits roll, there's the sound of a flushing toilet. Each one of the film's hazing scenes centers around butts and poop. Clearly, director Paul Ziller knew a thing or two about butts and poop.

Half weak comedy, half uninventive slasher, and all terrible, *Pledge Night* exposes the naked truth about college fraternities. Namely, they're pretty gay. If *Evil Laugh* hinted at the potential of a homoerotic slasher-comedy, then *Pledge Night* screams about it at the top of its lungs while marching in a gay parade. From here on out, it's all jock straps, maraschino cherries, and six-man pile-ups. In that order. Literally.

It's Hell Week at Phi Epsilon, despite the winter. The frat house sports walls that are spray-painted with phrases like "Life Sucks" and "Phuck." Five pledges are forced to participate in "The Phi-Ep Cherry Race" (buttholes and cherries), "The Strings On Little Wieners" (corn on the cob tied to you-know-what), and eating a banana disguised as shit out of a toilet (no official name for that one, sorry). Forty-five

minutes later, it's revealed that the nutty "Crazy Dan" is really possessed by "Acid Sid." Sid is Freddy

Krueger as interpreted by Randy "Macho Man" Savage. Sid was a pledge from 1968 who was accidentally killed in a hazing prank. Everybody dies. Sid attempts to rape a girl. He makes a bid for sympathy. It's not a touching moment.

*Pledge Night* is a dysfunctional chop-shop. The tone meanders, gross people have sex, and lines are recited with great difficulty. None of it is fun, thanks to the blatant stupidity, mean-spirited attitudes, and a defective sense of humor. There's some excessive gore thrown in toward the end, but the awful one-liners ("This one's for Spiro Agnew!") made me forget about it. Phuckin' A. (JZ)

# POSSESSION: UNTIL DEATH DO YOU PART (1987)

**Lloyd A. Simandl & Michael Mazo**

Frankie is crazy! Frankie kidnaps attractive women and ties them up in his home! Frankie yells at the women! A lot! Then he kills them. Just like the maniac in *Don't Go In The House,* Frankie is a misogynist living under the thumb of his mother. To him, all women are whores. But there is one saint: his mom. Frankie is trying to find a woman like Mom to marry. All of this made me tired. My first thought was "Oh no, 90 minutes of kidnapping women and ranting." I hoped there might be some kind of amusement to be had, like the rantings of Jack Rippington in *Fatal Exposure.* Instead, *Possession* confounded me.

One of the kidnapped women escapes. So Frankie, now sporting camouflage fatigues and face paint, follows the girl to a party in the middle of nowhere. Some ladies are having a bachelorette party there. They invite some male strippers and have lots of sex. Everyone gets drunk, high and laid. And Frankie makes sure that everyone gets killed.

At that point, *Possession* felt like a standard slasher. But the switch from the kidnapping/torture/yelling first half to the slashery second half wasn't so clean. The two halves didn't gel. I thought about where the film might be going during the kidnapping sequence. Eventually, we got to the bachelorette party. It was unexpected, certainly. It seemed as if the movie was intended to be a "Mama's Boy Gone Bad" film, but there wasn't enough there to flesh out a feature. So, the movie was turned into a slasher. Even the title seems to imply that the "Mom" stuff was the main focus.

This push and pull of the film is tricky. The first half, while not quite as derivative as the second half, is rather tiresome. Once we hit the second half, the film becomes more entertaining. But in no way does the opening section feel like a set-up for everything that follows. A

kidnapping misogynist obsessed with finding a stand-in for his “Saint Mother” suddenly turns into a wisecracking slasher. How is the viewer supposed to digest that properly? There are two directors listed. Maybe one made a short film, which is the first half, but was unavailable for the rest. So the second director came in and went in a different direction.

Whatever the case, the filmmakers are implying that the ladies and their bachelorette weekend are on the same level as Frankie. We follow Frankie in the first half of the movie. He kidnaps women and kills them. Clearly, he is the bad guy here. Then, in the second half, we follow the women as they do drugs, get drunk, and seduce male strippers. In a regular slasher film, this is the sort of behavior that seals a character’s fate. It turns out that *Possession* is a slasher, so of course we want to see how everyone dies. We were meant to sympathize with the women earlier in the movie. Are we meant to sympathize with them now? And how are we supposed to feel about Frankie? He’s now a slasher killer, lurking around and knocking off characters. Any other facets to his character have vanished. Many viewers root for the killer in a slasher film. Here, the viewer’s expectations have been flipped around. Is *Possession* subjugating everything we know about slasher films?

When thinking about a film is more interesting than watching that film, something is either very wrong or very right. *Possession* is more the former. The only reason I’d watch it again is to marvel at the schizo structure of it all. (DB)

# THE PREY (1984)

**Edwin S. Brown**

If cute animals make you poop your drawers with glee, then this is your slasher.

*The Prey* is both hilarious and quaint in its failures. It's the only horror outing from porno director Edwin Brown. Brown takes the forest-set slasher, strips it down to the bare essentials, and interjects a bunch of stuff that means nothing to anyone but Edwin Brown. In other words, most of this film is devoted to stock footage of animals. There is also a vagina shaped waterfall.

In 1948, there was a forest fire at North Point Woods. In 1982, a couple of old farts eat beans and comment on how good they taste. Axe to the faces! From there, a mutated killer stalks four campers and two forest rangers. There's no motive for anything and I didn't catch any of the characters' names. The forest ranger sings children's limericks on the banjo. A deer is his audience.

Jackie Coogan, who once played “the kid” in Chaplin’s *The Kid* and Uncle Fester on *The Addams Family,* interrupts investigations to discuss cucumber sandwiches. I was hoping that Lisa Loring would also show up, but I don’t believe in miracles. Once in awhile, the killer gazes at some almost-bare boobs and frolicking squirrels. Eventually, the only survivor realizes her true calling as a person who will make babies.

Presented as a serious slasher, *The Prey* is really just a padded mess of loose tangents and wasted atmosphere. However, the film's simple story, generic wooded locations, and ridiculous ending make it feel like an urban legend come to life. With that mindset, the film becomes fun rather than taxing. Forget the terrible choices in editing. Ignore the illogical things that come out of people's mouths (A girl asks, "Sure you won't change your mind?" after five minutes of sitting around and doing nothing). Relax and think about something else while frogs, snakes, spiders, hawks, raccoons, butterflies, vultures, and caterpillars explore their vast habitat. Although *The Prey* is mostly incompetent, there's a charm at work that's impossible to ignore. I blame the animals. (JZ)

# PRIMAL RAGE (1988)

**Vittorio Rambaldi**

"I had an abortion. Welcome to the real world."

What more could you possibly want out of a movie?

*Primal Rage* borrows the plot and general sense of chaos from George Romero's *The Crazies,* gives it a shot of Cro-Magnon idiocy, and adds an "Avoid The Noid!" poster, an A.L.F. stuffed animal, and a relentless z-rate metal soundtrack. Leap-frogging over mundane hilarity (padding that involves racquetball), squirm-inducing gore (eyes ripped out) and the savoir faire of the late 80s (skull costumes from *The Karate Kid), Primal Rage* does not ask much of its audience. All we have to do is keep our eyes open.

Sam is a roving college photographer. He rides around on his scooter. Sam's pal, Duffy, is a wise-guy reporter. Three sexist frat boys (outfitted in matching designer sweatsuits) cause problems. Elsewhere on campus, a quiet scientist with a miniature ponytail performs brain tests on a monkey puppet. But then, the puppet is somehow confused for a real monkey. The real monkey, now plagued with a sexually transmitted disease, bites and infects Duffy. Duffy infects his new girlfriend. An attempted rape scene causes

bigger laughs than thirty episodes of *SCTV* strung together. The STD spreads. People die. Sam cries. A lot.

*Primal Rage* is full of unexplainable stupidity. This makes perfect sense, as it was written by Umberto Lenzi *(Ghosthouse; Cannibal Ferox)* and directed by Vittorio Rambaldi (writer of Lenzi's *Welcome To Spring Break).* This is a wrecking ball of harmless skank, filled with perverted touches and very little style. The camera points, shoots, and captures events that have no bearing on the plot, but major bearing on our level of enjoyment. A cop car runs over a baboon. An infected jock exits a room by knocking down a door instead of opening it. Everyone wants to rape everyone else. The movie's climax takes place at a Halloween dance. The dance features amazing costumes (Mr. Spock, an oversized lumberjack with a saw through his head) and a performer that sounds like Debbie Gibson if her band was comprised of punks. Who knew that contamination by monkey

AIDS could be so fun? (JZ)

# PSYCHO GIRLS (1985)

**Jerry Ciccoritti**

A woman clad in purple lingerie walks down a hallway. The camera follows, ass-level, until she reaches a bedroom. There's a man in the bedroom. He has a thin moustache and snorts cocaine. The woman is revealed as the man's sexual therapist, and their session is over for the day. Upon hearing this news, the man attempts to rape the woman. The phone rings. The man stops. He answers the phone.

That is the problem with *Psycho Girls.*

*Psycho Girls* is inundated with questionable choices. Why rush through several prologues, only to end up at a dinner party that lasts for five days? Why present the whole thing as a book-in-progress, like *Stand By Me?* Do we need to be informed of the time of day by a typewriter every fifteen minutes? The reasoning behind these

decisions is not important. After all, this film is Canadian, and that says a lot. The real cause for concern is that I still fell asleep despite the appearance of a killer with a makeshift hockey mask and a *Scarface* impression. It's a bad *Scarface* impression. But really, all *Scarface* impressions are bad.

Victoria and Sarah are sisters. Sarah killed their parents with rat poison pancakes. "Fifteen Years Later," the asylum that housed Sarah is closing its doors. She is free! "Four Years Later," Victoria is a cook at the home of the noir author who is telling us this story. "The Next Day," everyone is getting ready for the dinner party. At "2:30 PM," the author and his wife have a combination weightlifting/sex encounter where both participants may have been doused with a bucket of water beforehand. At "3:45 PM," there's a 2.5 second shot of a woman walking out of a room. Also, Sarah kills Victoria at the abandoned asylum. At "5:30 PM," the party starts. Sarah has replaced Victoria as the cook. People say things like, "That goes back to our Marxist days in college!" and Sarah serves Victoria's remains as a meatloaf. Then, "From Midnight Till Dawn," the party moves to the asylum. And torture. And death. And an altar. Two guys fight with plumbing pipes for a long time.

Is *Psycho Girls* a thinly veiled comedy? A gore film without the gore? A way for the screenwriters to prove that they mastered Psych 101? There's a lot going on in this film. Most of it is good. Dubbing from the Doris Wishman school of "don't show any mouths." Unexpected camera placements, like from the point of view of a desktop skull. Edits that have no logical explanation. Unfortunately, the film spends too much time setting up events that no one cares about, and that cancels out the good stuff. I don't want to hear a psychologist talk about the id and the superego. I want to see those people have wet sex again. I want that Jason Vorhees rip-off killer to actually kill someone. I want to cut twenty minutes of the bloated 95 minute runtime. I can't do any of these things. And that is my problem. (JZ)

# PSYCHOS IN LOVE (1987)

**Gorman Berchard**

Joe and Kate are in love. They're both psycho killers who hate grapes. And they're in the middle of a part-Woody Allen/part-Marx Brothers faux-documentary with a touch of *Airplane*-style humor. The two leads are quite charming as they tear their way through tons of (mostly obnoxious) people. Joe runs a bar so there are lots of scenes at his bar. Kate is a manicurist so there are occasionally moments of manicuring.

My first thought on the film was that it was a horror-comedy. But it's not quite. I'd say it's more of a relationship comedy that happens to have tons of killing and gore in it. And some of it is quite funny. The scene with the camera almost bumping into them is great. The scene where they encounter a cannibal plumber is excellent. Some of the killings are hilarious. And there are some pretty amusing talking head sections with Joe and Kate.

The story has several twists and turns to it, including when they kill together and the scenes with the plumber. But there is a point where we fall into a bit of a rut. Some killing, some arguing, a scene at the bar that goes on a bit long until it seems like filler and then repeat. I had the same sort of thoughts about *Cemetery High,* another of Berchard's films. If this had been 45 minutes, I think it would have

been brilliant. As it stands, it feels like all it has is a set-up and then a series of scenes – some excellent – and then an end. Much of the middle doesn't seem to be there and that's most of the movie.

As charming as the two leads are, there are moments when the acting almost made me think of a Troma film. This is smarter than the average Troma film and some of the mugging and overacting left me a trifle cold. It feels like they were having fun but it didn't always quite make it through the camera and onto the TV. Some of the *Airplane*-style humor doesn't quite work; the grape bit is as annoying for them as it is for us. I think that's because you need really solid actors to pull off that kind of comedy. We need to believe them 100% because they are about to say and do some really silly things. These actors don't always pull it off. It's the comedy equivalent of a fake building on a stage. We look at it and say, "That's not real but I will believe it now." What they're saying in this movie isn't quite as funny as they think it is, but they're saying, "Believe it for now." It's not always easy. (DB)

# REST IN PIECES (1987)

**José Ramon Larraz**

If I were granted one wish, I wouldn't waste it on global peace or a million bucks. Instead, I'd wish that everyone in the world could hear the instrumental theme song from *Rest In Pieces.* Just once. There would be a bazillion eargasms. Everyone would win.

Sadly, after the first two minutes of *Rest In Pieces,* nobody wins. And that's despite an ass-ripping metal theme song by "Future-score" and freeze frames of an airport. José Ramon Larraz is the guy behind stylish 1970s erotic-horrors like *Vampyres* and *The House That Vanished.* Here, he directs us into a broom closet of Isotoner slippers, big boobs, and old people with fake British accents. There are a few striking peaks, but we're also teased with the promise of a "concert" which ends up involving a string quartet. Stop! In the name of Futurescore!

Helen and her husband Bob (Helen: “I was young when my mother died”; Bob: “It’s no wonder you can’t cook!”) have inherited a retirement community. They’ve also inherited eight million dollars from Helen’s aunt, who committed suicide on video. Soon after, Helen drops her aunt’s ashes and they blow all over the place. Closets, car headlights, and shower curtains begin to have a life of their own. Just like Andy Milligan’s *Carnage.* Then, some geriatric residents gore up a room full of musicians. Bob tries to ignore the French maid’s advances. Everyone might be dead, but not really. The film still has an hour left.

*Rest In Pieces* utilizes a script that was obviously inspired by any number of 1950s EC Comics. That’s a good thing. Unfortunately, poor compositions and terrible acting fuck it all up. This is like *Ghosthouse* set in *Evil Town* minus the Duran Duran references. There’s a light stream of thick blood and a couple of jumps, but the film moves like an old Sedan. It sputters, slows down, and eventually stalls. I doubt anyone involved was paying attention. Eventually, the credits roll. Larraz pulls another freeze frame and replays Futurescore’s hit. This victory was bittersweet. (JZ)

# RETURN OF THE FAMILY MAN (1989)

**John Murlowski**

The set-up of this film seems oddly perverse to me. Many minutes are spent explaining that the killer is a man who kills families. Then, the killer kills a group of people who are not related to each other. I seem to remember a couple of siblings in this group of people but that’s it. Was an entire family unavailable? If so, why not change the title? Or did the title *Return Of The Buddy Murderer* not have enough

kick to it? Was *Return Of The Chum Killer* deemed to be “too nautical”?

Somewhere in the “United States,” two groups of disparate people meet up at a rundown house for a weekend getaway. Someone else is on the way over to the house, too. It’s the Family Man, a deranged killer of families. But he’s got some traveling to do and the groups have some shenanigans to take care of before anything can happen. You’ve got some time. Make some noodles.

I can’t love all of these things. When they’re lackadaisical, they can at least try to be a little insane. This film is lackadaisically sane to the extreme. If it was just about people in a secluded location getting killed, it might be OK. But an abnormal amount of time is spent setting everything up for the Family Man’s arrival. My favorite parts of many of these movies occur before the killings begin. But in this one, my favorite part was neither before nor during the killings. It was after. Plotlines and “business” are piled on and none of it catches fire. By the time the killings started, I wished the film well and hoped it would end soon.

When I was younger, I would have watched this and thought it was decent. It was a slasher. That’s all I wanted. As a grown-up, I feel like my time is being wasted. The makers of *Family Man* may have had the best intentions in the world but the film they’ve made is lifeless. I was going to ask who this was made for. I knew the answer, though. It was made for me, a horror/slasher film lover. But if it was made for me and I don’t like it, something is very wrong. (DB)

# THE RETURNING (1983)
# aka THE WITCH DOCTOR

**Joel Bender**

I remember a dad going to the desert with his wife, Susan Strasberg, and their son. They found some Native American relics and brought them home. The son died in a vehicular accident.

After that happened, the dad begins to act exactly like his son. He sleeps in his son's bed. He goes to his son's school and plays on the swings. He may have been possessed or he may have been going crazy. I remember Susan Strasberg returning to the desert. The relics were bleeding and she was bringing them back. An old Native American man chanted over the relics. That's all I remember about *The Returning.* Even though I took notes, I can't recall much of this film.

I want to love every movie I watch. I get no joy from movies that do not give me something – anything – to hang my hat on. Something like an interesting story, compelling characters or an eerie atmosphere. Nabokov once said, "A good reader . . . an active and creative reader is a rereader." I believe the same holds true for watching films. I watch every one with the intention of watching it again. I can enjoy a film the first time but the devil is in the details. My favorite films become stronger with each viewing.

*The Returning* did not make an impact in my mind. It does a few diverting things. Watching a grown man's mind deteriorate and seeing him act like a little boy held my attention for a while. Mainly because I wanted to see where the movie was going with that plotline. There is a tangent involving a man who may also be possessed due to the theft of the Native American relics. The man lives in a dingy apartment. The dad keeps appearing near the apartment. The mystery behind that plotline was intriguing but it didn't go anywhere. In the end, the film feels too conservative in its insanity, like it's saving up big moments to "wow" the viewer at the climax. But the big moments never happen.

If *The Returning* presented a new twist on the possession story or was infused with more energy, then I could work with it. To give a comparison, there are a hundred slashers out there with set-ups and stories like every other slasher. The best ones manage to put their own stamp on things. *Boardinghouse* and *Don't Go In the Woods* follow their own muse and do things that the viewer remembers. That's what *The Returning* needed to do. I like Susan Strasberg. I'm always willing to watch curious white guys meddling where they shouldn't. And, yes, trying to figure out if the dad was possessed or just crazy kept me watching. But more was needed. More energy. More individuality. This film was calm when it should have been going wild. I want to say, "I won't be returning to *The Returning".* But that seems too obvious. (DB)

# REVENGE OF THE LIVING DEAD GIRLS (1987)
# aka LA REVANCHE DES MORTES VIVANTES

**Pierre B. Reinhard**

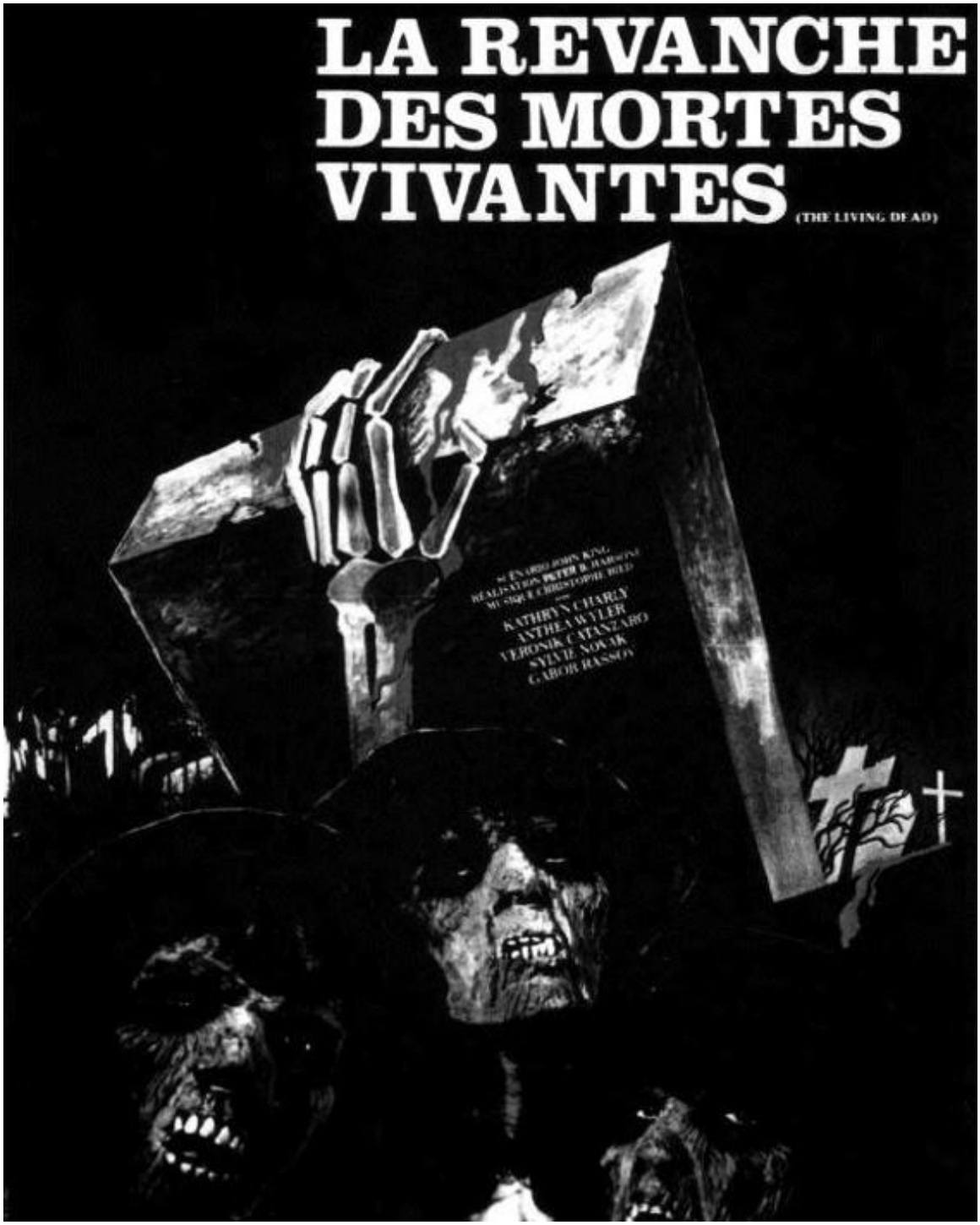
Mes joues sont rouges! Translation: Boy, are my cheeks red!

When I think French trash-horror, I think Jean Rollin. Then, I think Jess Franco. But beyond their work, a small group of notable films

exist. American in content, but clearly inhuman in all other aspects, these movies run the gamut of trash entertainment. *Ogroff* was revelatory. *Devil Story* was hilarious. *Seven Women For Satan* reacquainted me with the beauty of sleep. Regardless, the French are always dependable for showing us things that we've never seen before. For instance, take porn director Pierre Reinhard's *Revenge Of The Living Dead Girls.* Have you ever witnessed a four-way orgy between a prostitute and three female zombies? Zombies who, in fact, drive cars, ring doorbells, go swimming, and push swords into exposed vaginas?

*Revenge Of The Living Dead Girls* is driven by perversion. There's not really a story arc. Gross-out is the intent. That goal is met. Like *Devil Story, Revenge* establishes a half-assed, illogical plot, then promptly explodes in a grimy rhapsody of deviance. We tag along with three dime-store female zombies for 73 minutes while a series of semi-related vignettes unfold. There are several love affairs. Some Hershey-squirt gore, combined with frequent full frontal nudity. A nasty pregnancy flub. Religious zingers. And yes, the vag-stab.

In no-budget trash, there's a fine line between overt callousness *(God's Bloody Acre)* and friendly sleaze *(Don't Go Near The Park). Revenge* is not jaded or angry. It pushes buttons, but does so within the context of an absurd, one-track-mind fairy tale. The congenial shock-for-shock's sake is what makes the film so harmless, and therefore enjoyable. Especially when a zombie woman bites off a penis. (JZ)




# REVENGE: BLOOD CULT II (1986)

**Christopher Lewis**

This is the shot-on-film sequel to the shot-on-video *Blood Cult.*

Sometimes you write a sentence and it just seems so far-fetched. I couldn't write fiction that crazy.

Beginning immediately from the end of *Blood Cult,* those goof-balls who worship in the Cult of Caninus get up to shenanigans again. Or, actually, continue the shenanigans from the first time around. This time they just look a little more cinematic. All of this goes on and on for about 100 minutes. It shouldn't take that long because *Revenge* repeats the same exact story that *Blood Cult* did.

*Revenge* is about a couple of people discovering what the Cult of Caninus is and who in town is part of the cult. But we found out those answers in the first movie. Why do the filmmakers' force us to learn these things again? Granted, we also get hot gals in bikinis, people who spontaneously combust, John Carradine and Patrick Wayne, who isJohn Wayne's son. But that doesn't distract from the fact that they are repeating themselves to fill up the running time.

My problems with both *Blood Cult* and its sequel are the same. Professionals made these movies. Everything is uniformly competent. But films like these need a touch of madness. *Revenge* has some very gory death scenes, but they're not insane. Most of the movie consists of long conversations that go nowhere and murder chase sequences that are rarely suspenseful. Then the whole thing ends. *Blood Cult* had a sense of mystery as the sheriff and his daughter try to dredge up what's going on. If we've seen *Blood Cult,* we already know the story that *Revenge* attempts to tell. We know what's going on from the first film and we follow different characters as they solve a mystery. But the slow investigation that sometimes works in the first movie just drags here.

*Revenge* isn't one that demands your attention. Watch *Blood Cult* intently and then put *Revenge* on in the background, maybe while you're cleaning your house. You can accomplish two things at once and feel good. (DB)

# THE RIPPER (1986)

**Christopher Lewis**

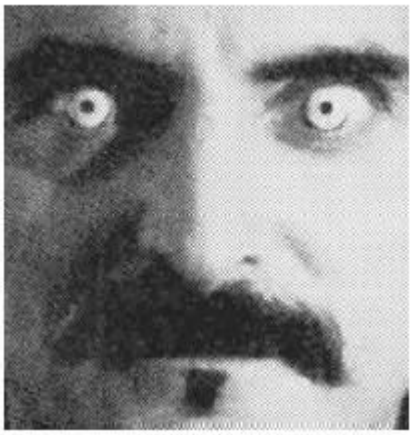
Tom Savini has had a very successful mustache for many successful years. Does that have anything to do with the success of *The Ripper?* Of course it does.

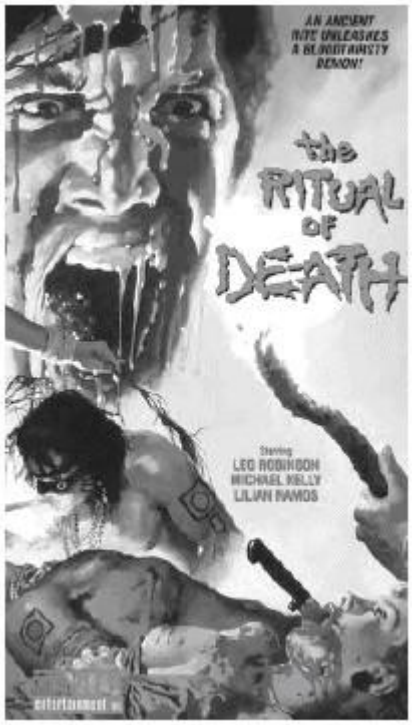
Riding the wave of *Blood Cult,* which turned a $1,000,000 profit from a $125,000 investment, director Christopher Lewis and producer Bill Blair quickly returned for another dose of SOV anarchy. Taking the general template for their previous hit and upping the gross, *The Ripper* moves just as slowly as its older sibling, but delivers more laughs. Also, special effects maestro Savini receives top-billing, but appears in the film for exactly five minutes. Translation: you can watch this more than once.

Richard, a nerdy college professor teaching a class called “Famous Crimes On Film,” finds a ring in an antique shop. The exact same ring, it seems, that’s featured in a book about Jack the Ripper. Richard’s fiancee wants a brass headboard from the antique shop. Instead, Rich throws down a Grant and buys the ring for himself. Insomnia! Dinner theater nightmares! A top hat-wearing villain disemboweling women! At the same time, a couple of homely college kids engage in extended make-out scenes (“You sure are SWEET tonight!”) while a gratuitous *Blood Cult* plug unfolds on a TV screen. Savini (as Jack the Ripper’s cat-eyed spirit incarnate) shows up, does his worst *Wizard Of Gore* impression, then exits. We also get a throat slashing by telephone cord and a round of Trivial Pursuit.

*The Ripper* lasts for 104 minutes. Every scene drags on for much longer than it should. The videography is washed out, grainy, and paints most of the cast in an unattractive light. Add the intense violence and you’ve got a film that should, by all means, make for a dismal experience. Thankfully, the quirks (that woman with the very large glasses, a Jazzercise sequence) and semi-competent atmospherics provide just enough amusement to even things out. It’s no top-drawer classic, but you can throw it on, possibly fall asleep, and still enjoy.

Entertainment value notwithstanding, *The Ripper* was another hit for United and Bill Blair. This film's profits allowed them to expand and move forward as SOVs began to flood rental stores. Blair split his company into a new division, VCI Home Video, to differentiate from United's upcoming releases. Consolidated in the late 1990s under the name VCI Entertainment, the company still thrives today, all from a couple of regional video productions. And Tom Savini's mustache. (JZ)





# RITUAL OF DEATH (1990)

**Fauzi Mansur**

My secret passions involving a decapitated goat's head and sex have finally been realized.

Flip through Pete Tombs' *Mondo Macabro.* Call a few video stores. Scour thousands of eBay auctions. Chances are, you'll still come up with zilch. Such is the degree of obscurity concerning Brazil's Fauzi Mansur and his uncomfortable films. In 1989, after churning out porn for twenty-plus years, Mansur capped off the smut with filth of a different color. Perhaps the reasoning behind this abrupt change in direction will never be known. It's really none of our concern. Today, the virtually unknown *Ritual Of Death* and *Satanic Attraction,* both directed by The Fauz and released on VHS by Complete Entertainment *(Deadly Love),* are among the final bows in mysterious, direct-to-video 1980s sleaze-horror. Unfortunately, Coffin Joe's own Brazilian legacy is in little danger of being challenged. That's what really gets my goat.

*Ritual Of Death* attempts to do things by the books. Literally. Brad and friends discover a hairy Egyptian book about Indian rituals. Their decision to interpret said rituals as theatrical performance art speaks for itself. Brad gets possessed. Brad kills everyone. Human smoke machines. Ferocious gore. Lots of nudity and puke. People humping in a bloody bathtub with severed goat heads. Everything else is indistinguishable, as each minute pushes the film that much further into dream-like absurdity. "This is a sacred ritual . . . but not good theater!"

Where international perverts such as *Revenge Of The Living Dead Girls* offer harmless thrills, *Ritual* plays for keeps. Distasteful and unrelenting, the film cancels out initial charms with its stone-faced presentation of sex-tinged gore. There's no fun. No emotion. No enthusiasm. There's nothing to balance it all out. Even the unintentional humor (drugged dubbing, people constantly screaming) is hampered by the overblown violence. Granted, the anxiety that the

film incites is a great feat for dirt-cheap trash films of any size, shape or form. The gore content is through the roof. Faces ripped off. Eyeballs pulled out. A plane propeller cutting someone in half. But this isn't Coffin Joe's *At Midnight I'll Take Your Soul.* No matter the era, it takes finesse and passion to pull off an admirably disturbed experience. Take away the gore and *Ritual* is simply an empty-headed goon. (JZ)

# ROCKTOBER BLOOD (1984)

**Ferd and Beverly Sebastian**

There are many ways to rock. However, if you are unable to master rock's most formidable weapon, the Cat Scream, there is no hope. You might as well call Chip Z'Nuff and inquire about cat scream lessons because NO ONE WANTS TO HEAR YOUR SONGS IF YOU CANNOT DO THE CAT SCREAM. But before you snort ten lines of coke in rageful frustration, check in with Billy from *Rocktober Blood.* He might be able to help:

"I want blood! I want hot, steaming pussy blood ALL OVER

MYYYAH FAAACE! YEEHIIIHIIIIIHIIIIEEEEEAAAAH!"

If *Rocktober Blood* were nothing more than Billy and his band playing songs called "Rainbow Eyes" and "Watch Me Rock," I would be happy. I'm not happy. I'm ecstatic. Although two-thirds of this film completely waste my time, the final third has enriched my life in more ways than one. A man, his killings, his women, and his songs. They say it's the "ultimate rock total blood and gore show!" It is not. But the credits roll with a cat scream that lasts for exactly 45 seconds.

Billy's band sounds like Rob Halford and Randy Rhoads meeting up to cover lost *Spinal Tap* outtakes, only better. Billy is also a crazed killer. He takes out his producer and manager and other rockers during a recording session and leaves girlfriend Lynn for dead. Twenty of the best minutes you'll ever see are now over. Two years later. Billy has been "executed for killing twenty-five rock 'n' rollers,"

or so says Rick Righteous, coke-sniffing “MVTV” host. The Rock is ditched and the focus moves to Lynn’s day-to-day life as lead singer of Headmistress. This equates to montages of partying, taking baths, walking in a forest, working out, and being frightened by Billy. Yes, he’s back. And yes, the explanation for his return is hilariously stupid. You can clean your bathtub or make dinner until the final ten minutes, when Headmistress plays a concert while Billy gorges women on stage. A security guard wears jogging shorts.

Here comes another Halloween picture, this one with a rock-and-roll theme. Sebastian International's "Rocktober Blood" opens in the States this month, with members of the Sorcery rock group playing a fictitious band named Headmistress. Sorcery were in "Stunt Rock" back in 1981, directed by Brian Trenchard-Smith. Lead guitar player Richard Taylor (pictured here), who co-wrote six of the seven songs in "Rocktober Blood", holds copy-rights for over 150 songs. He's also tall (6ft 3in), dark and handsome, with a soft, Europeanized Texas accent, having lived in London and Rome for several years . .
OCT 20 1984
Richard Taylor.
Hollywood Hotline
SCREEN INTERNATIONAL

After one viewing, *Rocktober Blood* appears to be a total shitter. There’s barely any bloodshed until the end. The entire film was

comprised of montages. The actors do not pause for punctuation. The ending was most likely achieved by running out of film. But then, a week later, you catch yourself singing “I’m Back” while waiting in line at the grocery store. You go home and watch the film again. This happens often. Five more times. Twenty more times. Whatever it takes to truly appreciate that golden half hour of cardboard coffins, ass close-ups, and non-dedicated performances of atrocious metal songs. This film is here to rock your balls and your hot, steaming pussy blood. (JZ)

# RUNAWAY NIGHTMARE (1982)

**Mike Cartel**

“Viewer discretion advised. Nudity.”

Call the 105-minute *Runaway Nightmare* the life’s work of a dedicated crazy person. Call it a supernatural porno without the porn. Or, just call it awesome. One-time director Mike Cartel may very well be the authoritative expert on terrible filmmaking. Is this movie the ultimate “large, wet dream” for testosterone-bursting males? Is it a sly comment on the state of early 80s filmmaking? Is my foot ON FIRE? All will be revealed. Because right now, it’s time for the most magical experience you’ve ever experienced, which lasts about five minutes. It’s time for *Runaway Nightmare.*

Ralph (Mike Cartel) and Jason are farmers at the Death Valley Insect Ranch. A couple of guys bury a cardboard coffin in the desert, where Ralph and Jason happen to be sunbathing. They dig it up. Inside is a

naked girl. Jason carries her back to the insect farm. A bunch of femme fatales bust in, flash some knives and guns, and kidnap our heroes. The ladies, led by a woman named Hesperia, are caught up in a feud with the mafia over a suitcase of platinum. Ralph and Jason are forced to join the club after a series of strenuous tests, like sleeping in a barn, having sex, and hanging upside down. Before you know it, Jason gets a hot foot, a toolbox blows up, and two girls settle things with a noncommittal duel: “I’ll make this quick. No! I’m gonna take a loooong time with you!”

*Runaway Nightmare* is filled with people staring. It might have been post-dubbed by aliens. Most of the cast communicates with grunts instead of words. This film isn’t weird. It’s just unbelievably dumb, kind of like *Frozen Scream* minus Renee Harmon’s “talents.” SOV scenes of nude women are inserted throughout the film whenever there’s just a hint of sex. No heads are shown. Just hands groping boobs. People burst into laughter at jokes that we never hear. Random dreamlike imagery (a mansion-sized bedroom in the back of a utility van; a vampire girl inside of a picture frame) blows through like cocaine in the wind (which also happens). Occasionally, there’s a shot that looks like it may have been composed by talented people. Big deal. (JZ)

# SATAN’S BLADE (1984)

**Scott Castillo Jr.**

A lawyer says, “Oooh, I’m going to have to give this ‘case’ my closest personal attention, counselor.”

Then, some hands touch some boobs.

*Satan’s Blade* stirs a cauldron filled with wintery locations, exotic violence, and idiotic happenings. When that cauldron overflows, the world stands still. There’s time to marvel at the snow, cringe at the tit-stabs, and rest your eyes while the camera captures the art of people walking from two miles away.

Welcome to Big Bear Lake, California. Two cabins. One mountain. Tons of confusion. Tony and Al are badasses. Tony has a mouth that twitches. “Disco” Al is the king of horrible jokes. They are joined by their wives for a wild and crazy weekend. Next door, a group of ladies arrive to party the weekend away. But wait! Apparently, there’s a myth about the mountain. The spirit of a “giant man” is said to prowl the mountaintops at night, searching for evil things to do. Now the killings begin. But what relation does our murderer have with Satan’s Blade? What’s with the bank robbery scenes? And what the fuck is a Satan’s Blade anyway?

After a thrill-filled prologue (blood, deceit, naked bank robbers), *Satan’s Blade* plows over you with an hour of “development.”

This includes drinking whiskey, sex, fishing, and soul-searching conversations in front of a fireplace. Salvation comes in the form of a seriously creepy dream sequence and a manic, violent climax. Nothing makes sense until the final three minutes, but don’t sweat it. The stark photography, wretched acting, and tedium erupt with that certain something, even amidst the boring parts. *Satan’s Blade* is lovable, but not essential. You don’t need a lawyer to touch your boobs to figure that out. (JZ)

# SATAN’S STORYBOOK (1989)

**Michael Rider**

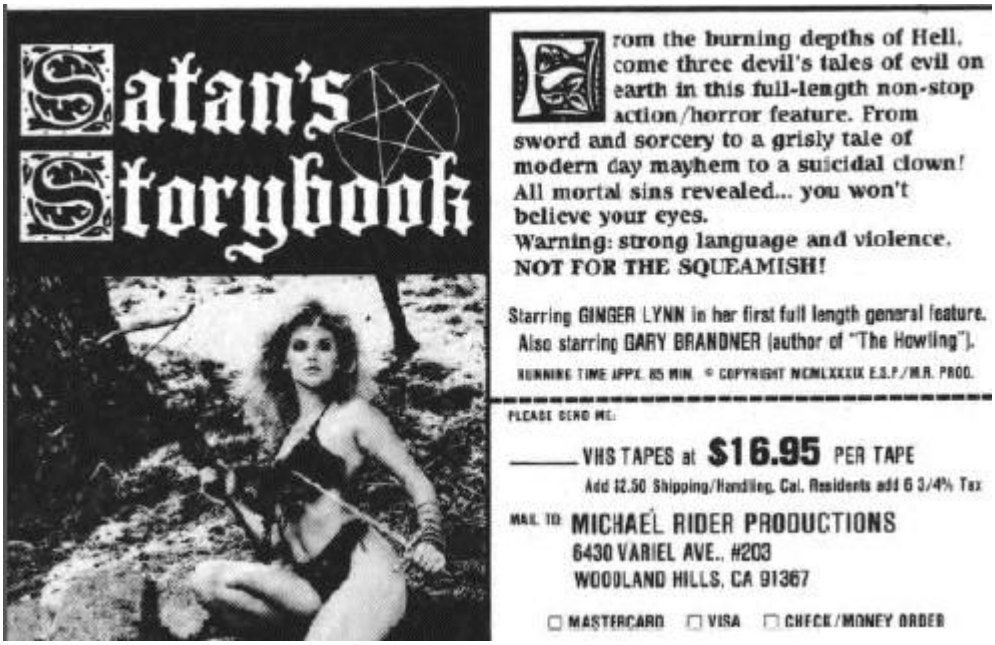
A small void exists between *Super Mario Brothers On Ice* and an evening at Medieval Times. Consider it filled.

*Satan’s Storybook* is a SOV horror film that focuses on conversational gobbledygook concerning “prophecies,” “The Dark Realm,” and death. It’s borderline pretentious. That is, if a porn star cast as a ninja could be considered pretentious.

Presented as an anthology, *Satan’s Storybook* is really just two stories and . . . something else. A “wraparound” story includes smoke machines, a ninja warrior (porn lady Ginger Lynn Allen), The Devil

(lambswool chaps, big goat head), and The Devil's Jester (he does little dances). There's a lot of death-philosophizing here, but The Devil's unintelligible robot voice does nothing for the cause. The first story begins. A guy in an Exodus t-shirt breaks into a suburban house and murders a family. It's pretty grim and serious until the police interrogation scenes which are, quite frankly, hilarious. This is partly due to a guy screaming, "GAME TIME, YA BUTTFUCK!," but mostly due to a Fat Sheriff cameo. The same exact Fat Sheriff, in fact, who jiggled through *Evil Laugh.* In the second story, an alcoholic clown loses his job and hangs himself. He then comes face-to-face with an existential demon, who is also a clown. They talk for a long time. Is this life? Is this death? Can the Fat Sheriff's gut get any bigger?

Despite all of this ridiculous shit, *Satan's Storybook* is meant to be taken seriously. I think. The attention paid to compositions, lighting, and dialogue ("Love is as strong as death, and hate powers the two along!") all point to someone who was sincere about what they were doing. I'd like to believe that one-time director Michael Rider was beset with the need to explore DEATH and what it meant to him. That's why this movie is mostly just people talking about that. But then, how do we explain the less-than-enthusiastic fight scenes between skid row ninjas? We don't. The collision between the sincere and the ridiculous is what makes *Satan's Storybook* feel so alien. And that's what we want. While this film is nothing compared to the prodigious surrealism of something like *Ogroff,* the constant close-ups, grim tone, and ambitious-yet-shitty costumes resonate in a similar way. Even when you're half-asleep. (JZ)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# SATANIC ATTRACTION (1990)

**Fauzi Mansur**

Towards the middle of *Satanic Attraction,* a fat cop exclaims, “Now I don’t understand anything!” Mark those words.

Fauzi Mansur is back. And, he brought a slasher with him. After a lengthy career in porn, Brazilian smut peddler Fauzi Mansur said goodbye to the film industry with two outrageous jolts of back-to-back sleaze. Barely released by Complete Entertainment in 1990, the unpleasant *Ritual Of Death* was a hot mess of extreme gore, downbeat vibes, and sex with decapitated goat heads. *Satanic Attraction,* the immediate follow-up, retains the chaos. Such was my expectation, such was my dread. Luckily, the set of *Satanic* must have been stocked with Twinkies and cocaine. Progress this focused is difficult to achieve without a happy push.

Natives dance. A man in a humorously large stuffed animal head performs a satanic ritual. Two siblings slash their wrists. FOURTEEN YEARS LATER. A killer, who accessorizes with seaweed and skinny knives, is on the loose. Apparently, this man collects the blood of women in order to rejuvenate his zombie-sister, who lives in a coffin.

How do I know? Well, a lady DJ runs a “sensational” radio show out of a broom closet. That’s where she divulges intimate details about the killings as they happen. From there, we get lions and odd knick-knacks, a bar of soap with embedded razor blades, incest, a supernatural orb, people gorging on fruit immediately after sex, plenty of fake gore, real gore at the expense of fish and birds, and a crack team of heroes. This includes a pregnant woman in a bikini.

At 102 minutes, *Satanic Attraction* feels endless. Consider that a minor beef. Taking cues from Ruben Galindo’s *Cemetery Of Terror* and Jess Franco’s *Bloody Moon,* this film appropriates American trash-slash ambience into something unrecognizable. It’s creative, nasty, and off-putting – similar to the more serious *Ritual Of Death,* but more balanced. Because, in addition to the mismatched script, fidgety pace, and dark tone, *Satanic* is frequently funny. Dubbed screams from cartoon libraries. A zombie with slow motion voice commands. Plus, there are keyboard saxophones every five minutes. Always a sign of excellence. (JZ)

# SCARECROWS (1988)

**William Wesley**

I adore this movie. Like Byron Quisenberry’s *Scream,* it is a movie I have put on late at night more times than I can remember. But, also like *Scream,* it usually puts me to sleep. This isn’t a bad thing. I’ve watched *Scarecrows* all the way through. I know it’s good. Whether or not I catch the ending each time I watch it is inconsequential.

A group of Marines steal a cache of money and hijack a plane. They wind up in a corn field near an old, creepy house in the dead of night. In that corn field, there are scarecrows. As the Marines try to get away, the scarecrows come to life. These are not fun scarecrows who sing about wishing that they had a brain. These are terrifying scarecrows. They will take a knife, remove your brain and cram it in their head. *The Wizard Of Oz* would have been tragic but much shorter if the Scarecrow had done this to Dorothy.

The amount of incident here is a bit thin even for such a short film. But the atmosphere is strong and everyone is clearly giving it their all. Their enthusiasm becomes infectious. It's one of those films where, ten minutes in, even if the rest of it goes bad, the first minutes must be praised and recommended.

The Marines are distinguishable characters. Sometimes their acting is a little over-the-top, especially when they're expressing strong emotions, but it's never bad. The hijacked pilot is nondescript and so is his daughter but it's not really their movie. The three guys who own the strange house in the movie, the Fowlers, may or may not have been crazy Satanists. And, they may or may not be the scarecrows. So many questions are asked and not a single one needs to be answered. It's just not important.

The direction is very strong. The music is eerie. The location is perfect. The Fowlers' house seems like it should be on the cover of an apocalyptic black metal album. The movie scares me, plain and simple. I can imagine folks being disappointed with the vagueness of the story and the slight gaps in excitement. They're wrong. This is worth watching. It won't change the world but it will give you the creeps. (DB)

# SHRECK (1990)

**Carl Denham**

One of my high school friends had an older brother named Phil. Phil was a quintessentially cool big brother. He introduced us to *Daydream Nation,* Daniel Clowes, and Jim Thompson. He loved acid, beer, and getting laid. It was no shock to us that Phil was a staunch supporter of SOV porn, crazed gore films, and compilations of death footage. He would show us tapes that we had no business seeing, just to gauge our discomfort. And then he'd wrestle us to the ground.

Phil would have loved *Shreck.*

*Shreck!* The world's only Nazi-obsessed SOV slasher from Wisconsin! This is the story of three high school ultra-geeks who conduct an elaborate A/V seance to summon the ghost of WWII Nazi sociopath Max Shreck. They take it all the way. There are Christmas lights fashioned as swastikas. Swastika ceiling fans. A Rambo knife with a swastika handle. Hitler speeches. Nazi training briefs. My favorite: a pizza with a swastika made out of pepperoni. And of course, the coup d'etat: concentration camp footage. Is there a

reason for all of the Nazi stuff? Not really. *Shreck* would have worked just fine without it. But I understand why it's there.

A lot of things happen when we're teenagers. Some good. Some not-so-good. Nevertheless, a majority of the decisions we make at that age are done with very little thought. When it comes to dirt-cheap horror films, this lapse of thought often greatly benefits the outcome. Take Nathan Schiff's maniacal *Long Island Cannibal Massacre* or Tim Ritter's dreamy *Day Of The Reaper,* or even the Polonia Brothers' distressing *Splatter Farm.* All three of those films are creatively insane, and therefore memorable, because they were conceived by enthusiastic teenagers. Just like *Shreck.*

"Tonight, we're gonna bring back Shreck back to life to kill who we don't like!"

I love that. A slight linguistic faux pas, obviously the result of nervousness in the face of a camcorder, and it nearly makes the movie. *Shreck* is filled with this stuff. Wind constantly bumps the camera mic. Shreck, decked out in camouflage, duct tape, and hockey gear, sometimes stands against a wall and swings a chain for no reason. Gore is generously supplied by a bottle of Hershey's syrup. The soundtrack finds Human League in a horrendous boom box jam with Queensryche. Clearly, this film is a good time. When you add the surprisingly unique time-travel twist(s) and the occasional moments of surrealist drone, *Shreck* shifts from good time to great time. Which makes the inclusion of death camp footage all the more puzzling.

But really, you can't blame these kids. When you're young, a boner is a boner. You've got to go where it takes you. Sometimes, it takes you to a place that unfortunately has yet to be emotionally cultivated. Sometimes, that place is called *Shreck.* (JZ)

# SCREAM (1981)
# aka THE OUTING

**Byron Quisenberry**

You never set out to spend the night in a haunted ghost town with older Hollywood actors, like Alvy Moore, Woody Strode, and Hank Worden. I don't think it's a thought that would even occur to you. But, after seeing *Scream,* you might want to.

*Scream* is an eerie film. It's set on the street of a ghost town and within its decaying buildings. People get killed, including Alvy and Hank. The other people argue. Time passes. Like the characters in Bunuel's *The Exterminating Angel,* the group seems unable to leave. We see a wall, somewhere, that has weapons hanging on it. There is a room with mysterious nautical paintings and figurines of a butcher, a baker, and a candlestick maker. Typically, the last person alive in a slasher is a woman. This woman is usually termed the "Final Girl." In *Scream,* the Final Girl is a fat guy named Lou who wears a Houston Oilers hat.

There is one weird element that makes *Scream* stand out amongst all the other American horrors of its time period. That's the creeping camera. People talk. Suddenly, the camera begins to pan or track away, generally into the darkness. The characters do what they will. The camera is up to something else. There are moments when we

are out in the darkness and the music is playing low. The camera creeps along the buildings. Nothing is happening but it feels like something will. The anticipation is overwhelming. These moments scare me to bits.

The actual backstory behind the killings is very vague. A tale is told by a visiting cowboy, played by Woody, that seems like it should make sense but it doesn't. When the movie ends, we see those figurines and the paintings again. With these closing images, the director is saying, "The reasons for all the killings should make perfect sense now." My mind is saying, "Not really." I have watched this film more times than I can remember. Every time, I think that this will be the time when I understand what's happening in the film. But I don't. Over and over, I'm left out in the cold. The synths play. The camera pans. I get scared. I don't get it.

*Scream* is not a big film filled with a thousand extras, stampeding elephants, and space battles. It's a group of people on ghost town sets being attacked by nothing. It's all in the details. During one scene, a man stands in a darkened doorway. He steps back into the darkness for a beer and we hear him get violently killed. The camera floats up to the door. It slams in our faces. Moments like this pepper the film. Eventually, they conglomerate together and make the film a creepy, head-scratching experience that I recommend unreservedly. (DB)

# SCREAM DREAM (1989)

**Donald Farmer**

You love VFW heavy metal. You love hand puppets. And of course, you love the shit out of genital violence. Yet, you feel alone. Anxious. Guilt-ridden over your enthusiasm for interests that aren't exactly orthodox. *Scream Dream* understands. *Scream Dream* is listening to your problems. *Scream Dream* is making spaghetti from scratch, popping a bottle of Chardonnay, and taking off your pants. This is what *Scream Dream* does. And when *Scream Dream* does something, it does it very, very well. Just ask Linnea:

“Hey Linnea, you’re just the drummer’s fucking girlfriend AND

THAT’S ALL.”

*Scream Dream* is glorious, significant, and borderline illiterate. Another Tennessee SOV from Donald Farmer, this film portends to be a heavy metal horror film. It delivers on that promise, as long as your definition of “heavy metal” involves Southwestern tapestries and vocals-without-mouth-movement. But, there’s something fresh going on. Like *Twisted Issues, Scream Dream* is a SOV horror film that is also a document of a music scene. In this case, it’s the one that surrounds real-life band RIKK-O-SHAY and their friends. The whole thing runs 69 minutes. There are

Amiga graphics everywhere. The protagonist is a male back-up singer. For all of these reasons, *Scream Dream* is a final triumph. For SOV. For you and me. And most certainly for Derrick, the back-up singer with a leonine perm.

After an unrelated chainsaw-to-the-vagina credit roll, things continue to happen. Michelle Shock is the lead singer for an incognito RIKK-O-SHAY She gives a fan named Rick a blowjob, turns into a demon, then castrates Rick with her mouth. Derrick is one of two back-up singers in the band. He goes to Michelle's house so they can have sex. She turns into a demon puppet. Derrick kills her. Lou Sharkey is

the band's record label liaison. He yells a lot and says, "I'm not talkin' to no reporters – especially cunts on the rag!" Lou hires a new singer named Jamie. Derrick goes to Jamie's house so they can have sex. Jamie reveals her nice big boobs and tries to stab Derrick during the height of passion (which consists of palms-on-faces and gentle rubbing). Derrick says, "No way, bitch!" and walks out. Linnea, as you know, is just the drummer's fucking girlfriend.

*Scream Dream* keeps going. Even when RIKK-O-SHAY performs their six minute Courtney Love-meets-Skid Row non-opus "Ball Buster." Even when the demon lady calmly mugs for the camera. And especially when Derrick gets his crotch bitten by a wet puppet. Dubbing overlaps existing audio, incidental music is provided by one drum machine and one shredding guitar, and cardboard boxes stand in for furniture. The film drunkenly floats, roams, and stumbles until it ends. Why did it have to end? (JZ)

# SHADOWS RUN BLACK (1984)

**Howard Heard**

Ten minutes into *Shadows Run Black,* a cop pulls out an enormous bag of cocaine. He points to it and yells, "DOES THIS LOOK

FAMILIAR?"

I think he was talking to me.

What is it about cocaine and slasher films in the 80s? From *Slaughter High* to *Iced,* the appearance of coke signals that good times have arrived and they will never leave. It's not like what happens in *Bright Lights, Big City* or *Less Than Zero.* We don't see the self-deception, physical deterioration, or general ruination that comes with the abuse of cocaine by rich white people with problems. Instead, we see "bad kids" or "class clowns" snorting a line and living like kings. They might get stabbed with a pitchfork by the time the movie ends, but that's not the cocaine's fault. A nice, fat pile of coke

in a shitty 1980s slasher pretty much guarantees that fun will be delivered. *Shadows Run Black* is aware of this fact.

This film has three priorities. First – presenting the most exciting ski-masked psychopath since Cameron Mitchell in *The Toolbox Murders.* The guy in *Shadows* is named The Black Angel. He keeps a list of his victims, like the killer in *Prom Night.* He also yells “dyke” and “nigger” when he kills people. Next – the practice of placing boobs on the screen. Big, small, sweaty, dry, whatever. There are a lot of them. And they are everywhere. Third – establishing an expertise in the use of an Apple IIe computer to produce a credit roll. So we have a ski mask killer, no shortage of naked boobs, and a ghetto credit roll. AND cocaine. I could stop there. I should stop there. But I won’t.

Utilizing a story arc that mimics *American Nightmare* (Sinners must be purged!), *Shadows* is a calm film with a slight affection for ridiculous details. Paramedics in blue jeans. Full frontal nudity while brewing coffee. A heroine who doesn’t show up until the 30 minute mark. An obese woman complaining about her unemployment checks. This is what would happen if *Fatal Pulse* partied the night away and woke up to a debilitating hangover and a magician performing with metal balls. Plus, Kevin Costner in a purple Members’ Only jacket. Some of the meandering could have been hacked out, resulting in a straight forward, nondescript slasher. But what’s the fun in that? We already have *Final Exam.* And that one didn’t even have cocaine in it. (JZ)

# THE SHAMAN (1987)

**Michael Yakub**

Yesterday, I was an average, ordinary man. Today, I am a Shamaniac. The following quotes from the film explain why:

“Said my head is red and my husband’s is too. And if you don’t like it, then poo on you! Yeah! Do the wash!”

“Speaking of dreams, would you like more wine?”

“Ok, I’ve got a joke. A guy in a station wagon is driving penguins down the highway.”

Clearly, *The Shaman* offers exactly what you seek. The limits of rational human behavior were stretched by *Twisted Nightmare,* yanked by *Sledgehammer,* and nearly broken by *Fatal Pulse.* Now, all bets are off. *The Shaman* is a hysterical shitheap of inaction, randomness and dysfunction. It’s saner than *Runaway Nightmare,* but tamer than *Frozen Scream.* Plus, it was released straight to video in 1987. What’s more fun than playing Charades? You bet – watching it being played.

The narrator sounds like he’s eating his microphone. A fat escaped convict sports a coonskin hat, but then we see his friend wearing it. Shouting. Stuttering. Sulking. Finally, The Shaman! He wears a black trench coat, carries a big tree branch, and combs the area in search of a successor. He says, “Now is the time for all my plans to come to fruition!” to no one in particular. Three couples with no names live near the woods. They have dinner parties. They go to the movies. They argue. There is a “subplot” involving two children and their lost dog. One of the men, Jack, works on his computer when he should be spending quality time with his wife. Jack becomes The Shaman’s minion. Then there are fistfights, broken knick-knacks, slit throats, and bloody towels. And women who get punched in the face.

*The Shaman* is a monument to trash-horror idiocy. Therefore, we are blessed with nonstop hilarity. Organization is an alien notion. Dialogue is blatantly flubbed and comes from the mouths of adults who have yet to grasp the intricacies of the English language. The dork-synth soundtrack gives *Samurai Cop* a run for its money. You may consider shooting yourself at the hour mark, but don’t do it! You’ll miss all the gratuitous jogging scenes. (JZ)

# SHOCK CHAMBER (1985)
# aka DEADLY PURSUIT

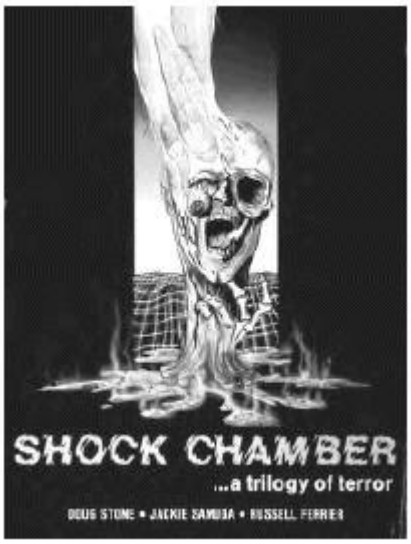
**Steve DiMarco**

Seven minutes, fifty-three seconds. I've had enough.

One hour, seven minutes, four seconds. An elderly woman asks, "Well, had enough?"

Her insight is impeccable.

*Shock Chamber* is a SOV anthology. Watching it is like being stuck on a cross-country bus trip in the middle of August with eighty year-old strangers. This is another protracted, uneventful film from Ontario's Emmeritus Productions (The *Tower, Survival 1990)* that makes you pay for your time with a general sense of wanting to die. Feel like watching a movie? *Shock Chamber* tells you to go ahead and hump yourself.




Every anthology needs a wraparound story. The one in *Shock Chamber* concerns a woman at a funeral and the reporter who interviews her about having quadruplets. This interview occurs at the funeral. "A Symbol Of Victory" relates the story of Ron, a nerdy buffoon who drugs his dad's secretary with a love potion. Ron walks

around, watches TV, and says, “We should go steady.” In “Country Hospitality,” a guy stops for gas in a hick town and falls for a waitress. There are shovel fights and people talking about tainted money. Plus lots of Coke product placement. Then we have “The Injection.” I’m not sure what this one was about, but it had something to do with a life insurance salesman and a *Taxi Driver* impression. *Taxi Driver* impressions are even worse than *Scarface* impressions.

If *Terrifying Tales* finishes just behind *Ghost Stories: Graveyard Thrillers* in the intolerable backyard anthology race, *Shock Chamber* finishes dead last, after everyone’s gone home. There’s no horror. The pace is stuck in cement. The actors are recycled from story to story, just with more or less mousse holding up their enormous hairstyles. This is one of the most challenging SOV experiences you’ll ever sleep through. Believe me. I’ve tried. (JZ)

# SILENT MADNESS (1984)

**Simon Nuchtern**

Sheriff Liggett yells, “Get the fuck out of here and lemme eat in peace!” He is fat. He sounds a lot like Richard Simmons. And he’s not fucking around. Neither is *Silent Madness.*

Before shooting commenced, the filmmakers of *Silent Madness* gathered a group of peers for lunch. They were feeling anxious about the intended no-nonsense approach of the film. Affirmation was sought. A script was reviewed. The scriptwriter of *Night Warning* was the first to speak up. “Well, you definitely need more sex, and possibly homo stuff. That’s what I did and look how my movie turned out. So do that.” Next, the costume designer from *Girls Nite Out* pitched in. “Your killer is just a guy in work pants. Its been done. We used a bear costume. Try a rabbit or something.” Finally, Billy from *Rocktober Blood* aired his disdain for the lack of cat screams and pussy juice.

Dejected, the crew parted ways.

Then, at 3 AM, inspiration woke director Simon Nuchtern from a sound sleep. “Wait a minute. What’s the problem? I’ve got a sorority house and an escaped mental patient. The synth orchestra is already booked. I like *Friday The 13th 3D* and *Halloween II.* Those other guys can get the fuck out of here! I’m gonna make this movie THE WAY I WANT in peace! Hey, I like the sound of that.” The script was kept intact. There would be no extended tangents, deeper plans or dubious novelties. Except for the 3D parts. And *Silent Madness* would be better off for it.

Say hello to Howard Johns. Not John Howard. Because of a “computer glitch,” mute Howard Johns is mistaken for rehabilitated inmate John Howard and released from Cresthaven Asylum. Pasty-faced Howard then begins killing en route to the “College For Women,” where he seeks some revenge. A van is destroyed, and skateboarding is very much a crime, at least to Howard. Meanwhile, Dr. Joan Gilmore seeks to figure things out as an undercover student at the college. Sheriff Liggett screams, “We can’t all think with our dicks!” at Joan and her boyfriend. That was a nice moment.

Released theatrically in 3D and presented flat ever since, *Silent Madness* is the familiar rehash we all yearn for. Aside from some boring exposition, there’s no room to complain. Synths are ravishing. Grit is ingrained. Photography complements the 3D novelty, resulting in kill scenes that are much more creative than the ones in *Friday*

*The 13th 3D.* Combine it all with solid acting from recognizable leads, a few laughs, some jumps, and a twist or two, and you've got an admirable rip-off that sticks to the basics and warms the heart. So how does Sheriff Leggitt feel about all of this high praise?

"That's the best news I've heard since the mayor dropped dead!" (JZ)

# SILENT NIGHT, DEADLY NIGHT (1984)

**Charles E. Sellier Jr.**

Summer, 1989. My friend Bill and I rode our bikes to Mokena Video. *Child's Play* was checked out. We rented *Silent Night, Deadly Night* and *Motley Cru'e: Uncensored.* Arriving at his house, we popped in *Silent Night* and got ready for something. Bill's dad walked by, just as the robber in a Santa suit was shooting a store clerk.

"CHRIST ALMIGHTY! WHAT IN THE HELL ARE YOU

TWO WATCHING?"

The tape was ejected and begrudgingly returned.

Winter, 1990. During a junior high party, *Silent Night* was thrust into the VCR. Everyone sat transfixed. Ten minutes into the tape, it was announced that a game of "Seven Minutes in Heaven" was happening in the basement. My bottle spun and landed on Jenny, who, in seventh grade terms, was thoroughly hot. We closed the closet door. Jenny asked me if we could talk instead of kiss. At school the next day, Bill spilled the details. Santa Claus impaled a naked girl on antlers? Then he decapitated a guy who was sledding? My God! As I'd find out later, all of it was true.

Winter, 2004. Scoring a weathered copy of the USA Home Video big box, I finally witnessed *Silent Night, Deadly Night.* I laughed. I stared in disbelief. I felt touched by Christmas rape.

Amidst controversy and protests, *Silent Night, Deadly Night* was pulled from theaters by Tri-Star Pictures within the first three weeks of its 1984 release. The film would go on to achieve a notorious reputation on home video, where it ultimately staked its claim. Imbued with greasy violence, sex-in-wood-paneled-rooms, and hilarious Catholic angst, *Silent Night* is the most anti-holiday trash statement since the Christmas morning tussle in John Waters' *Female Trouble.* And that was only one scene.

After witnessing the brutal deaths of his parents at the hands of a psychotic Santa on Christmas Eve, Billy heads for the orphanage with a baby brother in tow. Three years and one mullet later, Billy witnesses some sex in an upstairs bedroom. Nuns don't like it. Billy gets the belt and is tied up to his bed, for he must be PUNISHED! Ten years and many tans later, Billy lands a job at Ira's Toys, a local indie toy shop. On Christmas Eve, the store Santa calls in sick. Billy is elected to don the suit. He tells kids, "I don't bring toys to NAUGHTY children. I punish them. Severely." It's obvious what happens next. Billy's rage is triggered when an Italian Stallion rapes a woman at the company party. Death! To everyone! Not yet satiated, Billy turns his attention toward the rest of the town, then ultimately turns to the orphanage.

With its high production values, grade-school gore effects, and staggering lack of taste, *Silent Night, Deadly Night* is a pleasant apex in garbage cinema. Most obviously, it's a sleazy, derivative slasher. But really, it's a humorous attack on holiday cheer and those

poor saps, the Catholics. The film really shines when it loses all footholds on reality, and relies on jaw-dropping jolts (a priest shot dead in front of a dozen kids while he's dressed as Santa) to keep the fix going. The goals seem to be clear – ruffle as many traditional feathers as possible, exorcise a few subconscious demons regarding the holidays and religion, and deliver a fast-paced, over-the-top slasher filled with loads of T&A and bloodshed. It's an entertaining landmark in exploitation cinema. Especially if you are, or ever were, twelve years old. (JZ)

# SILENT NIGHT, DEADLY NIGHT PART 2 (1987)

**Lee Harry**

In 1987, the true spirit of Christmas was in the air: It was time to make more money.

L.I.V.E. Entertainment owned the home video rights for *Silent Night, Deadly Night.* So, they hired director Lee Harry and four writers to chop up roughly 40 minutes of that film, shoot approximately 45 minutes of new footage, and compile a sequel. The metaphysical depths that *Silent Night, Deadly Night Part 2* manages to reach will cut off your circulation and leave you for dead. It's just that retarded.

Through a series of flashbacks, Billy's little brother, Ricky, relates the events of the first film (Billy dressed up as Santa and killed a bunch of people on Christmas because of Catholicism) to a psychiatrist with a tape recorder. There are artsy shots of tape reels and feet. After a while, we get to the new footage, half of which is still told in flashback. Since Ricky was a tiny baby when the scarring events of the first film transpired, this all makes perfect sense.

Little more than a series of outrageous gore scenes (opening an umbrella in someone's mouth, pouring the acid from a car battery over someone's face) the film winks along merrily until it ends in barrage of shotguns, hilarious dialogue ("GARBAGE DAY!") and violence against nuns. Ricky is a buff mutant offspring of Katharine

Hepburn and Arnold Schwarzenegger. He spews one-liners and showcases his eyebrow twitching talents. When Ricky takes his soon-to-be-strangled girlfriend to a theatrical screening of *Silent Night, Deadly Night,* we get the joke.

*Silent Night, Deadly Night Part 2* is the perfect film for people who like redundancy and Christmas parties and a large man screaming mundane statements like, “I GOT A JOB!,” directly into the camera. So, you know, pretty much everyone. (JZ)

# SILENT NIGHT, DEADLY NIGHT 3: BETTER WATCH OUT! (1989)

**Monte Hellman**

I watched it but, in the end, I’d forgotten what I was watching out for. Apart from the killer who wears a plastic dome on his head because his brain is exposed. You don’t forget that.

Blind Laura has a psychic connection with Ricky, the killer from *Silent Night, Deadly Night 2.* Ricky is in a coma with that awesome exposed brain. On Christmas Eve, Ricky awakens and slowly follows Laura, her brother Chris and his girlfriend to Gramma’s house in the countryside. There is some killing along the way. He’s hunted down by cop Robert Culp and Richard Beymer as the slightly mad doctor keeping Ricky alive. In the end, the saga of Ricky and his brother finally draws to a close.

Monte Hellman directed this. He made *Cockfighter* and *Beast From Haunted Cave.* I enjoyed those. There are numerous moments in the film that make me think this might be a parody or general send-up. Ricky’s overall look and attitude doesn’t seem quite like parody but it’s certainly not taking anything too seriously. The closing shot has a very funny use of the psychic connection. *The Terror* plays on every TV. Most of Robert Culp’s dialogue is funny. And that’s it, really. Maybe it’s not a parody?

Maybe Hellman's making a standard slasher but tweaking it here and there to make it a little different. I can't quite tell. It is one of those films that is almost really, really interesting. But no one seems too excited about anything. What might have been interesting is kind of blanded out by the end. When Ricky or Robert Culp is on, the movie is fun. When Laura and Chris are on, it's vaguely interesting. But all the little bits in between seem lifted from the least interesting generic moments of thirty other slasher films. Slashers have awesome generic bits you can rip off. This one bypasses almost all of them.

A good director and the number of good actors making this have me thinking that the story behind this film is probably much better than the film itself. In the Alternative Earth that I enjoy visiting more times that I'd care to share, this film is subtitled *They're Watching Out* and it is about the making of the actual movie. A *Noises Off* for the slasher set. It explains the reasoning behind everything and is one hell of a story. That's a film to own and cherish. What we actually have is a mildly entertaining slasher that never really gets a rhythm going. The sight of Ricky and his exposed brain is amusing for a while. Then, it becomes part of the landscape and fades away with the rest of the movie. (DB)

# SKULLDUGGERY (1983)

### Ota Richter

Where on earth did this movie come from? Who is Ota Richter? Is there a Canon of Richter somewhere? The title should be a giveaway that this is going to be 90 minutes of goofball behavior. But it doesn't quite do that. This is like calling a film *Hugger-Mugger.* Intuitively, you think you know what to expect but you really don't. The basic premise doesn't give anything away as it seems to move us in an almost-standard direction: A guy, who is either cursed or possessed, starts killing people and it all has something to do with a sorcerer from the 14th century and a role-playing game.

Oh, those role-playing games. Yes, I played them but no one ever invited me to one like this. Instead of a simple map, there is a game board covered with giant cutouts of buildings, sort of a Dickensian village for Dungeons & Dragons fans. They play and play and play. The game scenes seem to be important to the movie. But they're really not. The Killing Guy doesn't go after the people playing the game until the very end. Instead, he goes after random folks, including a nurse, a fortune teller, and the people at a rather odd party. A party that feels like it came out of an *Emmanuelle* film, except without all the sex.

The film is filled with moments that make me scratch my head in confusion. Not in a "This isn't good" way. In a "What on earth made them choose to do that?" way. The theme song, for example. The *Skullduggery* theme is a bit disco and it's a bit show tune. It's gloriously cheeseball and it's all over the opening credits. We have a scene in "Canterbury, England 1382". Then, we go to "Trottleville, U.S.A. 1982." There's odd use of a Punch doll from *Punch And Judy.* Part of the oddness is that the doll appears in the "1382" sequence. I'm fairly positive Punch and Judy have been around a long time, but not that long. Maybe Punch was solo in 1382? Before he got married? Frankly, I don't think they should have ever taken the big step. I bet they fought on their wedding day. And I bet it was fucking hilarious.

The movie seems as if it was made by Europeans pretending to be Americans, like *Happy Hell Night.* People never quite act the way people in America act. At first, it seems like they're just getting it slightly wrong. But the film just keeps getting odder. Every few minutes something really strange happens on top of the regular strange stuff that's already happening and I realized that Ota was just having fun. What else can explain the scene with Liberace in the church? Or the random appearance of a couple named The Bulls, who wear red t-shirts reading "Trot-tleville Bowling League"? *Skullduggery* hides behind the premise of a horror film. But it's really just an excuse to show off all sorts of bizarre chicanery. Hell, this doesn't seem like a normal film from the moment it begins. (DB)

# SLASHDANCE (1989)

**James Shyman**

When *Killer Workout* heard about *Slashdance's* impending release, suspicion was in the air. *Killer Workout* thought, "Give me a break. I've got the song Animal Workout', burned boobs, and a giant safety pin – I WROTE THE BOOK ON DANCE-SLASHING!" Then, *Slashdance* was released straight to video. It had a soundtrack culled from a Yamaha keyboard demo, no nudity, and endless minutes of padding. Suspicion led to pity. Pity was replaced with disinterest. Today, *Killer Workout* is a bona fide sensation. As for *Slashdance?*

"Jesus Christ, I got beat up by a pair of tits!"

*Slashdance* has the sad atmospherics of a McDonald's employee training tape. It also has dumb jokes ("Her tits are too nice to be a cop!"), a Hollywood Boulevard travelogue, and women in neon leotards bending over. Aside from a brief intro and outro with a black-hooded killer who wears a cape, the slasher elements are missing. There's no plot. Lead character Tori has permanent bitch-face. A "wacky" guy eats a live goldfish. Two fat chicks sell steroids and there are pointless appearances from members of G.L.O.W. (the Gorgeous Ladies of Wrestling).

If *Slashdance* had pointless appearances from members of B.L.O.W. (the Beautiful Ladies of Oil Wrestling, last seen in

*Las Vegas Bloodbath),* it would be a different story. The sight of a pregnant woman in a bikini who eats pizza with her disgustingly long fingernails is grounds for celebration. But *Slashdance* doesn't have that. It has a lady named Matilda The Hun knocking over cardboard boxes. All of this is funny for approximately zero minutes. In layman's terms, this film is not good at all. (JZ)

# SLAUGHTER HIGH (1986)

**George Dugdale**

You love toilets. You hate jocks. You like cocaine, but prefer death by beer. I'm with you. *Slaughter High,* please don't fail us now.

With a hearty "April Fucking Fools, ya mutherfuckers!," the late poop-sleaze producer Dick Randall *(Don't Open 'Til Christmas)* bids you a warm reception. Speaking of crap, *Slaughter High* has plenty of it. Literally. If it's not the death via sewage drowning, it's the curious obsession with toilet bowls. Just like *Don't Open 'Til Christmas, Slaughter High* is a nasty, distraught slasher that takes place on a holiday and basks in dreariness. The basic plot of *The Redeemer* might spray some figurative Glade, but then a woman says, "You bastard, I wet myself!" and we're onto success.

Forget about Louis Skolnick; this is the real *Revenge Of The Nerds.*

Big-time doof Marty Rantzen has bigger problems. The jocks 'n' babes enact a series of humiliating April Fool's pranks, resulting in the public flippity-flop of Marty's dick and a face-frying explosion or two. Fast-forward to April Fools' Day, five years later. The wise-crackin', cocaine-snortin', beer-chuggin' gang has returned to Doddsville High. Class reunion or killer roust? Marty, his jester mask, and handfuls of gore have the answer.

There's nothing wrong with sleaze. In fact, I think it's great. Judging from the atypical gore and ruthless sexual punchlines, *Slaughter High* agrees. Unfortunately, there's one thing we don't see eye-to-screen on: the pace. Despite a perfect hack-score from Harry Manfredini (once again ripping off his own *Friday The 13th* work, just like he did with *The Children),* solid direction from George Dugdale and all those wonderful shocks, the 95-minute film drags for years while the cast arrives, investigates, talks, and then investigates again. The chasing of Caroline Munro (stylishly clad in a white circus tent) follows suit. Be grateful for the uncharacteristic creeps, thunderstorm atmosphere, and stupid-yet-brilliant ending; they're the caulk that keeps the cracks together.

*Slaughter High* might feel four days long, but there's always something dark and unpleasant to love. See it at least once, maybe

twice if you are/were a big nerd. I watched it twice. (JZ)

# SLAUGHTERHOUSE (1987)

**Rick Roesseler**

The Bacon Farm is no swell place to be during the day, but at night, it's horrific. Lester Bacon's home is being foreclosed and it's making him go crazy. His son Buddy only squeals and oinks and – not a surprise – he's as crazy as his dad. First, they start to kill the businessmen and lawyers trying to take their property. Then they kill some young people who happen to be trespassing.

*Slaughterhouse* sets itself up perfectly in its excellent pre-credit scene. A bunch of kids are partying in the middle of nowhere. Two of them wander onto a run-down property. They fall into a pigpen and are slaughtered by something huge. Then the credits begin and we see slaughterhouse scenes that are actually part of the movie rather than stock footage. It is scored with music that made me think this might be *The Odd Couple* with pigs. But then the pigs get killed. It's not subtle satire but it is there.

The film intercuts the Bacons' plight and their revenge plan with the kids hanging out, going to a dance for KFAT radio and making a New Wave-ish video in the slaughterhouse. I couldn't tell the kids apart. But the Bacons are distinctive and so is the revenge plot. Maybe the film was some sort of short and, upon expanding it, they added the kids and their partying? The revenge plotline is wrapped up after an hour. The last half hour brings the kids in to fill out the running time.

The film looks good. Everyone knew how to operate their equipment, which doesn't always happen in these movies. There are some scary moments, especially the scene with the masked guy at the window who encounters Buddy. The gore is sufficiently unpleasant and the overall feeling of the film is consistent. The last half hour lags a bit. We don't really know these kids, so we don't care about them. But you can't have everything. At least we have Buddy. (DB)

# SLAUGHTERHOUSE ROCK (1987)

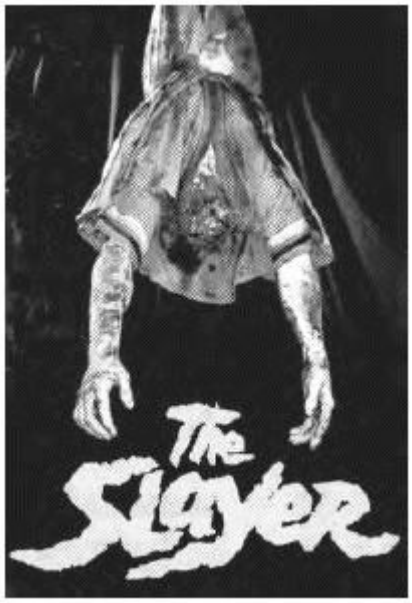
**Dimitri Logothetis**

You are chained to a stone wall. The ground is covered with fetid, rat-infested water. A decaying man approaches. He chops off your hand with a machete! You scream! You crap your drawers! But that doesn't stop this recurring nightmare known as *Slaughterhouse Rock.* It only ruins your slacks.

Alex is having terrible dreams about being chained to a stone wall on Alcatraz. So, he and a group of friends travel to the now-deserted island prison to stop the nightmares. Their visit releases the ghost of the decaying man in Alex's dreams, Commandant Mordecai G. Langston. Langston was a cavalry officer who worked on the island before it became a prison. He was also a cannibal and a Grade A asshole. Langston possesses Alex's brother, Richard, who starts killing everyone. Luckily, there is a good ghost on the island who tries to exorcise Langston. The good ghost is played by Toni Basil, who had a big hit with "Mickey" in 1982. In the "Mickey" video, Basil jumped around in a cheerleader outfit. If she had been wearing the cheerleader uniform again, *Slaughterhouse Rock* would have been much better.

For the first half of the film, we are in *A Nightmare on Elm Street* territory. This wasn't an anomaly in 1988 (take *Bad Dreams* and *Slumber Party Massacre II,* for instance). Alex keeps seeing this disfigured man haunting his dreams. Alex refuses to go to sleep. His friends think he's cracking up. He falls asleep in class and has a nightmare. He wakes up screaming. A clawed hand bursts through a wall. But instead of sharpened knives on a glove, Langston has sharpened teeth. The original Freddy Krueger was a child molester, a frightening character. Commandant Langston is a blue collar cavalary man. Somehow this movie doesn't have the same aura of terror as *A Nightmare On Elm Street.*

At the end of the day, *Slaughterhouse* is simply dull. In scene after scene, I never got that moment of connection that I want from a film; that moment when I think "I want to see where this is going," or "I want to see what happens next." Although it's competently lit and photographed, no suspense builds. There is no tension. There are just long stretches of people moving from one room or hallway to another. Toni Basil brings some vitality, even if she's not wearing a cheerleader outfit. But she doesn't appear until the midway point. Her presence throughout the movie would have helped immeasurably. As it is, I felt relief when the film was over. Even if my pants were ruined. (DB)




# THE SLAYER (1982)

**J.S. Cardone**

A demon is hiding in the dreams of a moody, artistic woman named Kay. One weekend, it gets loose and begins killing her friends and loved ones on a beautifully atmospheric island. People are going missing. Kay's dreams are becoming more vivid as the creature kills. No one really does anything about it. The killings are gory but infrequent. The actual demon is fantastic – a giant creature with long, sharp teeth that looks great up close and in silhouette. One look at it and you know that you're probably going to be dead in a few seconds. The whole film has a desolate, sad feel to it. I just wish I liked Kay.

This is a movie that feels like it was part of an anthology TV series. A movie that got expanded to feature length. The expansion means that the main characters talk a lot. But they didn't simultaneously expand the vaguely sketched leading lady. They really needed to. Kay stands around looking dour and artistic. She's been painting a lot of abstract things and is beginning to lose her audience. She has bad dreams that everyone talks about. And she never connected

with me. None of the other characters made me care about them either but that's fine. None of them were the lead.

This film definitely has more plusses than minuses. That desolate island and that demon make up for a lot of endless talk. However, the one big minus is enough to make this something that I don't go back to that often. I understand the tortured artist and I see what they were up to. But if that's your lead, give us some life around her. Make the other characters really interesting. Or, why can't the tortured artist make us laugh? Why couldn't Kay have been a master of sarcasm? That would have been great.

I almost love this movie. That's why I harp on about the one big speed bump. *The Slayer* is like a series of horror tableaux. That sounds fascinating but it can drag while you're waiting for them to set up the next image for you to enjoy. (DB)

# SLEDGEHAMMER (1983)

**David Prior**

Everybody knows that Ted Prior is capable of ripping a man's arm off with his bare hands. Then, using that arm to beat the same man to death. We saw this happen in *Deadly Prey.* But what everyone doesn't know is that Ted Prior almost came over to my house for an interview. This is a true story. When Ted didn't show up, I called to see where he was. An automated message said:

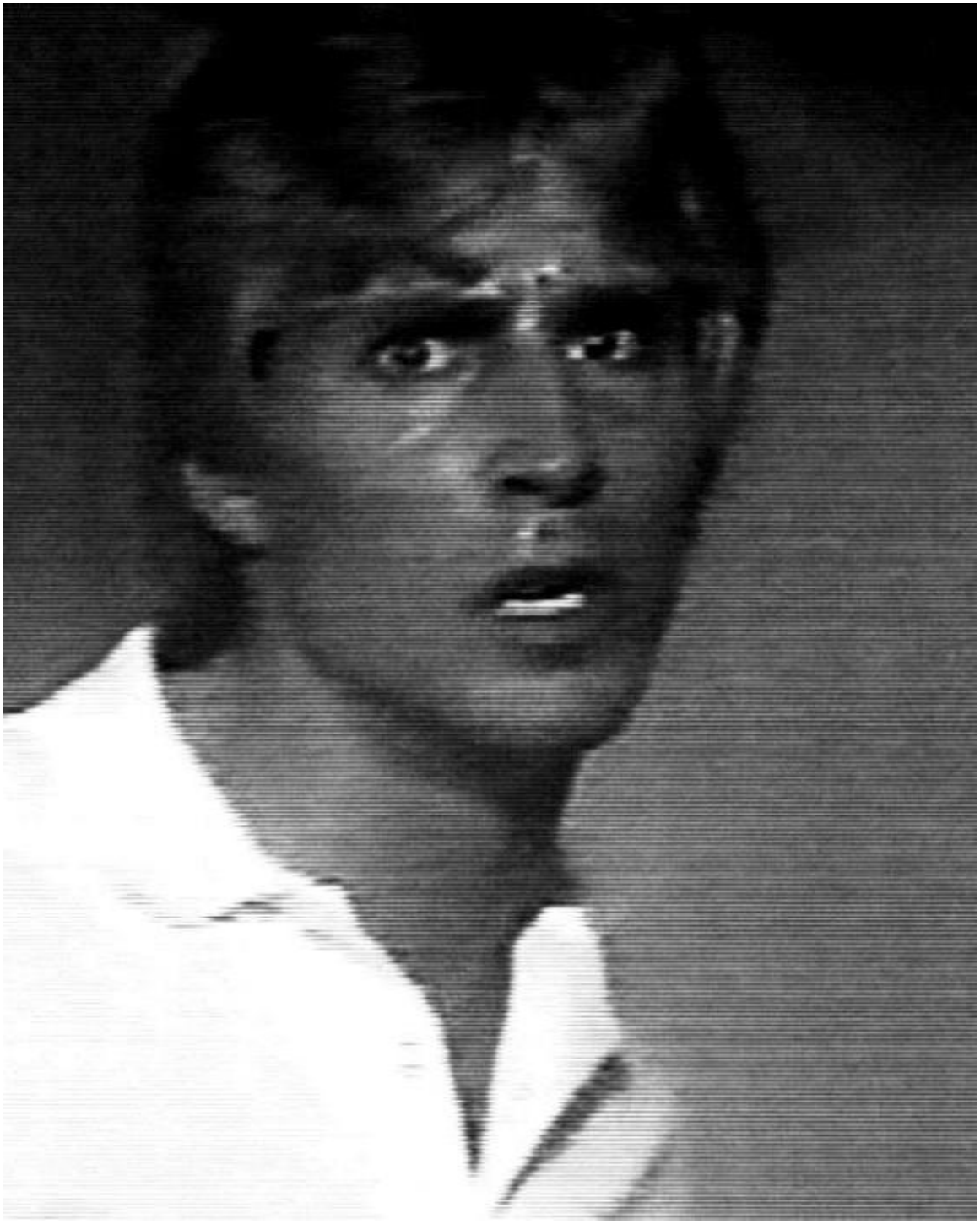
"This is Ted's phone! FUCK YOU!"

I brought the phone down and it exploded over my crotch. And now I can't make babies happen. Regardless, do not let my horrible, awful, inhumane, degrading, emasculating experience stop you from enjoying Ted Prior, his shirtless muscles, and his sensitive guitar strumming in *Sledgehammer.*

*Sledgehammer* is the debut film from writer-director David Prior *(Killer Workout; Deadly Prey)* and actor Ted Prior (ditto). It's also the

first SOV horror film that was produced exclusively for home video distribution. It beat both *Black Devil Doll From Hell* and *Blood Cult* by at least a year. That's why this film is important. It's not going to alter your perceptions of what can be achieved with a camcorder and people pouring beer on each other. It may not even consistently entertain you. But it was there first. For a stupid slasher that features stupid people doing lots of stupid things, *Sledgehammer* is, unsurprisingly, pretty stupid. That's what saves it.

A group of party animals spend a weekend in a sparse, uninviting condo that's haunted by the spirit of a killer. The killer is very large. He holds a sledgehammer, floats through hallways, and wears one of those semi-transparent plastic masks that make small children look like eighty-year-old men. Meanwhile, Ted Prior performs Bill Murray impressions while wearing green sweatpants, a guy stuffs an entire sandwich in his mouth, and another guy (who looks exactly like John Oates) avoids sexual encounters with his girlfriend. There is a food fight. There is a seance. Eventually, the killer starts to do his thing. A ghost child also haunts the house. He may have murdered his mother and her lover. He slaps Ted. HARD. Then Ted beats the shit out of a door.



With a fixation on needless slow motion (doors opening, locks turning, people walking, people kissing, sledgehammer attacking) and repetitive establishing shots (the front of the condo, the hallway, the kitchen), there's not much incentive to revisit *Sledgehammer.* Granted, the overdriven synths are perfect and I still have happy

dreams about the horrible vector effects. And no one will argue that the condo's claustrophobic atmosphere is genuinely frightening. But aside from that, this is a simplistic slasher that feels more bizarre than it actually is because most of what happens in the film goes unexplained. The pace feels like a reverse mullet, with the party up front and the business in back. There's never a moment when total madness takes over, as in the kitchen utensil massacre in *Tales From The Quadead Zone.* However, the credits name various crew members as "DAVID FUCHSIT," "HARRISON BAULES" and "JAC MEOUGH". (JZ)

# THE SLUMBER PARTY MASSACRE (1982)

**Amy Holden Jones**

There was a clique of girls at my high school. They smoked pot, but weren't stoners. They dressed conservatively, but fooled around. They could beat anyone at pickle-ball in gym class, but always played dumb in English. These girls were alluring and thoroughly untouchable.

Ainslynn was the best at pickle-ball. One day, we played each other. She destroyed me. As the bell rang, she looked at me, smiled, and said, "Hey, little dude – good game!" For some reason, I never forgot that day. And Ainslynn became even more attractive.

The girls in *The Slumber Party Massacre* state, "You can't bring back the old days." They're right. But let's face it, the occasional slip into nostalgia never hurts. *The Slumber Party Massacre* is a semi-sleazy, bare-bones slasher that features a group of girls who act just like the ones from my high school. It aspires for class while shunning general weirdness. The photography is surprisingly creative. There's a scene that centers on Kool-Aid, some ColecoVision synths, the phrase "Maui Wowee!," and a pointless-but-welcome sub-plot involving a babysitter. Thus, for 75 brief minutes, I was engrossed. I floated past the fully denim-clad killer, the listless midsection, and the women's lib commentaries. I laughed at the over-the-top breast 'n' butt leering. I admired the plotless audacity. Most of all, I just thought a lot.

Early 80s slashers have the power to invoke a special kind of nostalgia. It's not the same type of feeling you get when revisiting *The Goonies* or *Cloak & Dagger.* Slashers are more intimate. For obvious reasons (stupidity, horrible acting, heads getting chopped off), their acceptance was never as widespread as more competent films. So any sort of connection goes much deeper. When *Slumber Party Massacre* touches on certain elements – a way of decorating, a particular product, a group of girls in high school – that strikes a nerve, a feeling is captured. And that makes me smile.

Feminist intent allegedly ran high when writer Rita Mae Brown and director Amy Holden Jones conceived this film. The idea that a standard slasher with plenty of tits flopping around and women being murdered could also be MADE by women was meant to be a poignant statement. That, or a terrific inside joke. Either way, the sight of a girl chopping off the tip of a male killer's power drill made me laugh. Yet this is no retardo symphony a la *The Last Slumber Party. The Slumber Party Massacre* is what it is – a direct, unexceptional 1982 slasher with the ability to invoke pleasant thoughts of the "old days" in those who wish to have them invoked. That doesn't sound like a recommendation, but it is. (JZ)

# SLUMBER PARTY MASSACRE II (1987)

**Deborah Brock**

I arrived at the garage for band practice. Billy from *Rocktober Blood,* The Clowns from *Terror On Tour,* and Sammi Curr from *Trick Or Treat* were all there. As Rick Styles from The Clowns spread out the first line of coke, Billy pointed my attention toward a veiled object in the back of the garage. A white sheet was removed. There was a guitar with no strings and a big drill for a neck. It was the Drill-Tar. And it stood alone.

Easy Cheese! Shirts with tassles! Diet Pepsi! "Hand-burgers"! And, THE DRILL-TAR. I agree with the ladies of this film. *Slumber Party Massacre II* is indeed "The ultimate slumber party!" and yes, "Rock 'n' roll never dies, baby!" If your brain hurts from an '87 overload, let

it ride. After all, it's not every day that one film can combine the most successful elements from *Satisfaction* (Girls with guitars!), *A Nightmare On Elm Street 3* (One-liners!), and *Phantom Of The Ritz* (The fifties!) and TRUMP THEM ALL.

A girl band plays music that sounds like a tone deaf R.E.M. stuck in a dive bar. Courtney, a holdover from *The Slumber Party Massacre,* plays bass. She also has bad dreams and worries about her sister, who resides in an asylum after the events of the first film. The girls convene at someone's dad's condo for a weekend of band practice and dance sequences. From there, unexplained gibberish spews forth. There are food gags. There are gore gags. There's a song called "Tokyo Convertibles." People talk into the camera. A girl has zit problems. A wise-cracking killer materializes from a dream and takes time out for a breakdance segment. He also owns the Drill-Tar. Do any of the three endings make sense? Not on your life.

*The Slumber Party Massacre* set a cozy precedence for blunt, derivative and nostalgic early 80s slashers. That film did things how they should be done. *Slumber Party Massacre II* completely deviates from its older sister. Nostalgia is swapped for stupidity. The budget is sliced in half. Any splinter of sincerity is removed before it gets too deep. Yet, rather than wallowing in dorky in-jokes, this film pulls it off. Hysterical, but never self-righteous. Or boring. (JZ)

# SORORITY GIRLS AND THE CREATURE FROM HELL (1990)

**John McBrearty**

A group of sorority girls and their dates go to an old house in the woods. They party hard, sometimes with boobs. But there's more!

A convict escapes from a chain gang. A manhunt forces him closer to the party house. A demon in a cave sends a creature to kill the party, quite literally. The creature itself has a face that's tough to describe. It looks a bit like a hairless dog that is also wearing an ill-fitted latex mask.

The filmmakers of *Sorority Girls And The Creature From Hell* were obviously enjoying themselves. They went out to a cabin in the woods and decided to have nothing but a good time. The problem is that they are having the sort of fun that wavers between a-lot-of-fun-for-them and not-quite-as-much-fun-for-us. The bits with the escaped convict are played seriously. The killings themselves are played for horror. But the scenes with people hanging out seem more suited to the world of comedy. The actors do an awful lot of mugging and eye-rolling throughout the party. They're acting as if the things they're saying are reaching the pinnacles of mirth. There is no reason why the film can't have it both ways. It's just that the funny stuff isn't actually funny and the horror stuff isn't scary. This is one of those films that ends up leaving a bit of poop in the brim of my reviewer hat.

Did anyone in this film have a name? Yes. There was Sarah. And some other names like John, Steve, and Sharon, but not specifically those names. It doesn't matter. Nor does it matter who everyone is in relation to one another. As long as folks are fooling around and then getting killed, we're good. And that's what happens.

There's a lot of set-up. For a time, it feels like the creature may not actually show up. But it does. And it feels like the girls might not make it to the cabin. But they do.

*Sorority Girls And The Creature from Hell* never becomes really wonderful entertainment. It never becomes the sort of movie, like *Ogroff,* where you want to rush out and tell your friends to watch it. But the mix of sorority girls, murderous monsters and escaped convicts is novel enough to make this worth a viewing. And there are boobs. I mentioned that, but it's worth repeating. (DB)

# SOUL OF THE DEMON (1990)

**Charles Lang**

I never played hooky from school. I was always afraid that I'd get caught. Worrying about that would make me too anxious to enjoy the hooky experience. At the beginning of this movie, Joey and Toby skip school and go bike riding. They spend most of their time worrying about getting caught. I was on board with that. Then, Joey and Toby find the soul of Astaroth the Demon trapped inside a miniature coffin.

It comes to life and begins killing a houseful of young adults on Halloween night. At least it took their minds off getting caught.

However, before the killing begins, we all better get together for some slow-mo basketball and some primo hanging out with Joey's brother Josh. Josh has a superb mullet so he needs a bandana when he plays. If you don't have a bandana for your hair, that's OK. Josh has two. He probably has an extra pair of sweats too. Meanwhile, Joey goes to the library to research the statue. Yes, I know. A regular teenager goes to the library for research that is not school related? I did that but I was a nerd.

The first half of this movie is a lot of hanging out. Playing hooky, talking about demons, shooting some hoops and partying. I truly thought that the movie was just going to teach the boys a lesson about playing hooky. I didn't know that prolonged mass slaughter would be part of this. I believed that the "soul" of the demon was the storm raging inside the boys that forced them to be truant. I literally hit a metaphorical brick wall.

In the second half, Josh and friends begin their Halloween partying and, subsequently, their Halloween dying. The gore begins to approach the over-the-top levels of *The Burning Moon* or *Bone Sickness.* These killing scenes are not the quick cut/implied gore of many slashers. They're prolonged and bloody and painful. There is a head cut in half from side to side that had me wincing. It all seems like an extreme way to teach a lesson.

I made a trip down to the library to research hooky behavior after watching *Soul Of The Demon.* Imagine my surprise when I saw that the misadventures of Joey and Toby led to a 57% drop in truancies from 1991-1997. After 15 minutes on the microfiche, I started to feel like I was going to get in trouble. That's because I should have been home watching the movie. I rushed home and started the movie again. I got a little antsy waiting for the killings to start and then I got antsy when the killings started. It turns out I should have been vacuuming the house rather than watching this movie. (DB)

# SPINE (1986)

### John Howard & Justin Simmonds

Driving a Trans Am takes some backbone. Playing saxophone in Kenny Loggins' band takes a lot more. The killer in *Spine* has enough for both, and also a dry-hump rape through his jeans. Too bad it does nothing for his movie.

*Spine* is a SOV fetish-fest masquerading as an uneventful slasher. Super obscure? Definitely. Super good? Not really. Rather than spreading an even sheen of uncomfortable gore and sex throughout, *Spine* saves it all up 'Til the end. So we wait. There are fantastic jogging outfits. Inadvertent Bill Murray impressions. Gross misuse of "state-of-the-art" computers. A dry-hump rape scene after 30 minutes of bondage tedium. These are all wonderful things. But just like a dry-hump rape through the jeans, wonderful things mean very little without befitting context.

Decked out in mirrored sunglasses, a pink dress shirt, and alarmingly tight denim, the unnamed killer should be a struggling real estate agent. He's not. Instead, Mr. X cuts up nurses and scrawls the name "Linda" on walls with the blood of his victims. But we don't get to see any of that. Cops clue us in with incisive detail: "He's one for five with the rapes!" and "He's obviously pissed off at somebody named Linda!" Soon, we meet Carrie ("I go to swap meets a lot") and her friend Leah. Carrie and Leah are house-sitting. They also work as nurses. Oh shit! Ropes, a switchblade, and baby-talk lead to tired explanations and a non-refreshing "twist." Has it only been 72 minutes?

One-time directors John Howard and Justin Simmonds mastered the use of stationary tripods, mumbling actors, and zoom buttons. They were also big fans of the "fade to black" transition. However, instead of using their non-prowess to make me smile (i.e. *Blood Lake),* J 'n' J crafted a bedroom mail order tape for bondage enthusiasts. Typically, this WOULD make me smile, if only out of sheer fascination. But *Spine* is claustrophobic. And achingly slow. It saps

smiles and discourages fun. Thank goodness for the grimy aftermath gore, computer sleuthing, and that scene where the killer placed a knife between two legs and did something “suggestive.” If not for those things, I would obviously be pissed off at somebody named Linda. (JZ)

# SPLATTER FARM (1987)

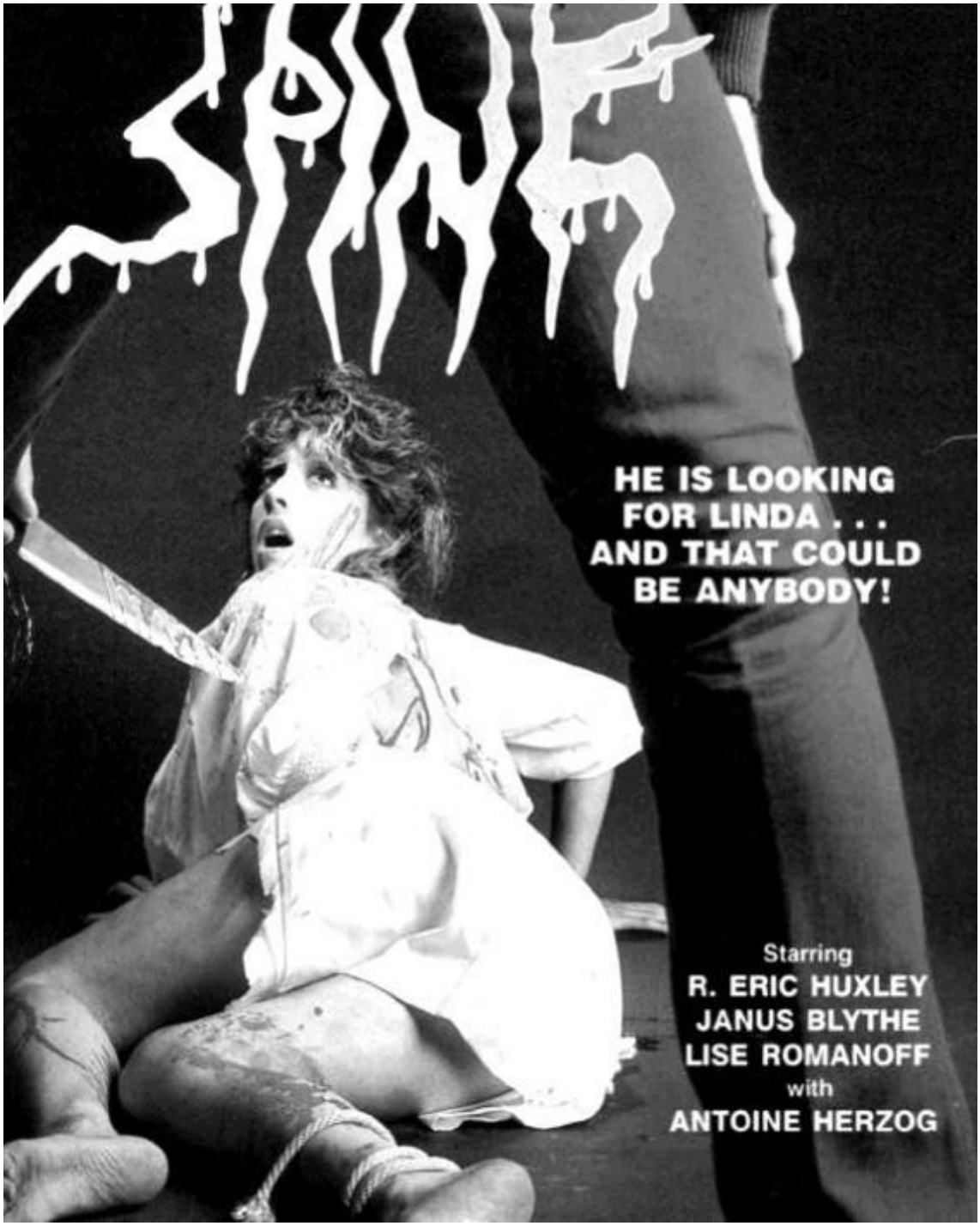
**Mark Polonia, John Polonia & Todd Smith**

Sexual cannibalism. Grandma incest. Gay rape. Tube socks. Ah, to be eighteen again.

SOV trash-horror is a great leverager. When sane filmmaking just won’t cut it, we, the dedicated, turn to SOV obscurities to provide the degeneracy that we don’t want to see, but cannot live without seeing. Oral sex with a potty-mouth puppet *(Black Devil Doll From Hell).* Gory, misogynistic corpse-porking by a “hippie” in a Hawaiian shirt *(555).* Bondage rape-fantasy by a guy who drives a Trans Am *(Spine).* As the well of SOV obscurity grows deeper, morals loosen even further. Down to the curb. The gutter. The darkness.

There lies *Splatter Farm.* And something isn’t right.

Thanks to *Splatter Farm,* teenage brothers John and Mark Polonia begat a SOV legacy that continued until Mark’s passing in 2009. Yet, also thanks to *Splatter Farm,* the Brothers P are responsible for making *Splatter Farm.* Get it? This is a 65 minute film which follows a couple of twin nerds (the Polonias) to a family estate for some sex ’n’ death deviancy. It’s plotless and frequently funny. Look at those glasses! Check out those short-shorts! Get a load of those speech problems! Then they throw in the sex acts, which involve watery gore, a senior citizen, a killer cousin, piss, assholes, lots of penetration, and lines like “I hate to spoil lunch, but I gotta take a shit.” Then, Grandma finds a firecracker shoved up her special spot. Jesus.




*Splatter Farm* is a portrait of creative youth in motion. It's reckless and sloppy, living for this moment and this moment alone. The film offers a sneak-peek of what *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* might look like if it was forced to ingest a 24 hour marathon of John Waters' *Desperate Living* at a high school A/V club meeting. The white trash

locations, bad facial hair and stoned synths do much to bolster the greasy atmosphere. On those terms, *Splatter* can consider itself a success. It shocks. And shocks well. On the other hand, the idea of teenagers crafting a gore film that relies on abhorrent sexual acts to keep things rolling is unsettling. It's a little too revealing, if you catch my drift. While that may be a reason in itself to rally for the film's distinction, it doesn't do much for actual entertainment value, SOV or otherwise.

Then again, I've never humped a severed head. So what do

I know? (JZ)

# SPLATTER: ARCHITECTS OF FEAR (1986)

**Peter Rowe**

A poor man's George Plimpton introduces *Splatter: Architects Of Fear:*

"It is the year 2002. The world has been destroyed by the final holocaust of nuclear fury."

That may be so, but the survivors still wear Zubaz.

This is a fictitious documentary about the making of a fictitious SOV film. But really, it's an ode to the mid-80s special effects guys who supplied horror films with multi-eyed mutants and full body dismemberment. *Splatter* follows a production company called Gory Philms as they're holed up in Toronto shooting a triumph that remains untitled. Before you leave the room, consider this quote from our narrator, following the explosion of a beer bottle: "The effect would make even Rambo proud."

*Splatter* utilizes an uncluttered template. We see the special effects scene as it appears in the “movie” (the screen features a border of blood around it when this happens, just in case you’re an idiot). Then we’re treated to an inside look at how each scene was created. There’s also a caffeinated comic relief guy named Fang who helps out. Fang was injured on a previous film, so he has one vampire tooth and scars that appear to be made with Jell-O. Narration helps us to understand that these people are “experts” and “professionals.” As girls with mohawks and face paint (“Amazons”) battle with guys in underwear and latex masks (“Mutants”), each stunt gets more ambitious, less convincing, and more hilarious. A girl ties a mutant to a wall, takes her clothes off, and has sex with him standing up. Instead of an orgasm, his head blows up. She says, “I fucked his brains out!” Another girl lies on a bed and moans before a full dismemberment. Her latex body cast looks like a blood-soaked Slip ’n’ Slide tied around a mattress. There are slow motion playbacks of each gore scene. The video culminates with people doing doughnuts in a parking lot.

I have no idea why the filmmakers chose to create a fictitious documentary as opposed to a narrative film. Sure, *Splatter* is a stupid, pointless excuse to ego-stroke a couple of special effects guys. But it’s also a determined exercise in independent horror, second only to Gary Cohen’s work *(Video Violence; Captives)* in terms of scope. The gore effects are bat-shit crazy and also totally unconvincing. That’s what makes them so entertaining. In other words, Gory Philms knew a thing or two about Phucking Phun. (JZ)

# SPOOKIES (1986)

## Eugenie Joseph, Thomas Doran & Brendan Faulkner

“Winner! 1986 Delirium Award from the 15th Annual International Science Fiction & Film Fantasy Festival!” That’s what the stamp on the cover of this VHS says.

I.S.F.F.F.F.: W.T.F.

Filmed in Upstate New York, *Spookies* began life as *Twisted Souls,* Thomas Doran’s ambitious, throw-every-monster-into-the-pot special effects reel. Editor Eugenie Joseph must have noticed something special about the footage. She filled the cracks with her own stuff, and then spliced it all together. I’m not sure what that third guy brought to the party, but I do know this: *Spookies* rips off *Ghoulies* and *Saturday The 14th* to forge a plotless cavalcade of limp comedy and goopy monster effects. It’s not very good.

I didn’t fast-forward to the middle of the tape and start watching from there, but it feels like I did. A zombie rises from his grave. A teenage birthday brat walks through the cemetery, stumbles onto an old mansion, and meets a hobo.

A hobo! 10 minutes down!

A young man, whose make-up insinuates that he’s an old man, lives in a mansion with his dead bride. She blinks and sleeps in a coffin. It seems that the “old man” needs to sacrifice people to bring back his wife, but we never get the integral who-what-where-when-why-how. After the zombie buries the kid alive, a group of folks arrive at the mansion. From there, a mash-up of 80s-styled monsters run around and kill the party-goers. There’s a possessed woman a la *Evil Dead,* a group of farting dirt ghouls, the Grim Reaper himself, and an army of zombies. A guy with a John Waters mustache tells jokes and people walk around corridors while talking. Another guy jumps head first through a wooden door. I laughed. The Grim Reaper falls off a balcony and blows up. I did not laugh.

Looking past the obvious compositional hurdles (odd edits, monotone delivery, lots of underwhelming inconsistencies), *Spookies* offers up an adolescent horror fan's wet dream: lots of spurting, multi-colored fluids, and related effects. Some of the giddy monsters wax nostalgic for that dorky, FX-worshipping era in "fantastic" filmmaking, but the end result comes up empty and taxing rather than enthralling. I did enjoy the concluding zombie romp, though. (JZ)

# SRIGALA (1981)
# aka THE FOX

**Sisworo Gautama Putra**

Did Jason Vorhees ever drive a speedboat?

*Srigala* is an Indonesian rip-off of *Friday The 13th.* But instead of a killer exacting revenge on campers, this movie has a killer exacting revenge on treasure hunters. Three men explore a river which might have a treasure in it. Soon, two women and a guy start sunbathing and scuba diving. The women break into a kung fu fight. There are also zombies that rise from the river at night. Meanwhile, a figure in a ski mask lurks around. This person gets involved in a speedboat chase which ends in an explosion. Eventually, everyone ends up in a cabin. The slaughter begins! Is the Indonesian Mrs. Voorhees doing the killing? Will we get a shot-for-shot replica of the final jump-scare from *Friday The 13th?* And will the Indonesian Freddy Krueger from *Khooni Murdaa* sit on a toilet and tell jokes?

Yes, yes, and goddamn it, no.

Aside from the last 30 minutes, *Srigala* is nothing like Sean Cunningham's trend-setting slasher. But really, who cares? The point is that an Indonesian producer saw the original and thought, "I can do this so much better." So he added speedboats and zombies and kung fu. Traces of *Friday The 13th* lingered. At the end of *Srigala,* we get to see Indonesian Jason leap out of the water and grab a girl in a boat. Just like *Friday The 13th!* The Indonesian Mrs. Voorhees

spends much of the movie trying to keep the characters away from her buried treasure. She also kills everyone during a rainstorm. Also just like *Friday The 13th!* However, there's no connection with Jason and no reason for his appearance during the film's conclusion. Is this a *Friday* rip-off with speedboats, or a speedboat movie that happens to have Jason in it?

*Srigala* works just like *Korkusuz* (the Turkish *Rambo)* or any number of rip-offs from overseas. Occasionally, these films are boring. But most of the time, they're fascinating. They weren't made to attain beauty or break new ground. They were made to ingratiate themselves with an audience that was already familiar with the subject matter. And of course, they were made to make shit-loads of money. Today, we devour films like *Srigala* out of sheer intrigue. We want to see how icons of American cinema were interpreted by another culture, often with hilarious results. For instance, take Mrs. Voorhees. In the original *Friday,* her presence in the movie made sense. She was justifying the batshit crazy killings. In *Srigala,* Mrs. Voorhees' appearance makes zero sense. She is protecting her treasure. But the people she kills at the end were never after her treasure. There's no reason for them to die. That is, except for the fact that everyone died at the end of *Friday The 13th.* What's good enough for Indonesia is good enough for us. (JZ/DB)

## STAGE FRIGHT (1980)
## aka NIGHTMARES

**John D. Lamond**

Australia, I thought I knew ye well.

When I watched *Endplay,* a late-70s “thriller” concerning wheelchairs and archery, a truth was revealed. Australian trash-horror is dependable for one thing, and one thing only: Ultimate zzz’s. Even the most engaging Australian trashers *(Houseboat Horror; Alison’s Birthday)* require a slight proficiency in the art of staying awake. This is due to long runtimes and a consistent lack of anything happening. When discovering *Stage Fright*’s Australian origins, I predicted the following:

1. This film will be two hours long.

2. This film will be tedious.

3. I will fall asleep within ten minutes and I’m not even tired.

*Stage Fright* is a disjointed slasher that prides itself on softcore sex, bumbling conversations, and full-frontal nudity during kill scenes. That’s really all there is to it. A psychologically scarred woman named Helen takes part in a terrible play (“This is a comedy about death!”) while various cast and crew members get killed. It’s a rehash of Pete Walker’s *The Flesh And Blood Show,* but even

cheaper. There's a failed attempt at artsy photography; a generic, mood-killing orchestral soundtrack; and arbitrary tangents that have no bearing on anything. The violence is over-the-top awesome in a *Don't Open 'Til Christmas* kind-of-way and the sour ending treated me right. Still, did we really need to see that play performed? Twice?

Eighty minutes later, *Stage Fright* was over. I was awake, yet fading. Not bad. But another hammer-to-the-boob scene wouldn't have hurt. (JZ)

# STRAIGHT JACKET (1982)
# aka DARK SANITY

**Martin Green**

The mentally disabled never catch an even break in trash-horror films. From Igor in *Guru The Mad Monk* to Tor in *Terror At Tenkiller,* these seemingly peaceful, mentally retarded men are revealed to be degenerates, killers, or unsociable hunchbacks. And also handymen. Apparently, they are capable of fixing a broken jacuzzi motor or strangling someone with a hose, but they can't put their clothes on properly. *Straight Jacket* is one of the more colorful examples of a film that delivers hilarity at the expense of a belittled handyman retard. His name is Benny.

"Benny's a couple of bricks shy of a full load, but he's harmless!"

"Who's that yo-yo working on our yard?"

"Benny hasn't got brains enough to go to the bathroom and come back clean!"

If you were to watch *Straight Jacket* based on Benny's presence alone, you would find yourself in a very fulfilling place. But Benny is only the beginning.

The "plot" concerns a recovering alcoholic named Karen, her hallucinations of decapitations, and her touchy husband ("You

yahoo! You lousy pig-faced bitch!"). Aldo Ray is a blubbering ex-cop with psychic powers. Middle-aged neighbors give push-up lessons while drooling over Karen ("She's got a cute lil' caboose!"). An after-hours office party features comedy that walks a fine cultural line between Cheech & Chong and The Three Stooges. There are flashbacks (and flashforwards) within flashbacks. A head appears in a trap door. There is a killer who appears to be four feet tall. Also, a bottle of booze is thrown at a wall. In slow motion. It does not break. In slow motion.

*Straight Jacket* barely holds it together. It's a rambling series of non sequiturs presented with complete ineptitude. In addition to the inappropriate 1950s library music cues, flubbed lines, and moments when the director audibly yells "CUT!," there's no sense of organization. It's total chaos.

I think of this film as what happened fifteen years after *The Last Slumber Party* ended. *Slumber Party* is a nonsensical trash-slasher about a teenage girl and her booze-fueled party. *Straight Jacket* is pretty much the same, except the teenage girl has grown up. And now, instead of having fun with booze, she's having problems with booze. If I try to piece together what this movie is attempting to say, I get frustrated. It's like trying to explain a John Barth novel to a ninety-year-old who has never read a book. *Straight Jacket* is simply an abnormal cinematic experience in the form of a no-budget slasher. Towards the end, it gets boring. I was tired of sitting through multiple A.A. meetings with Karen. But then a mannequin is thrown through a plate glass window. The mannequin is supposed to be an actual person but it looks nothing like a human being. (JZ)

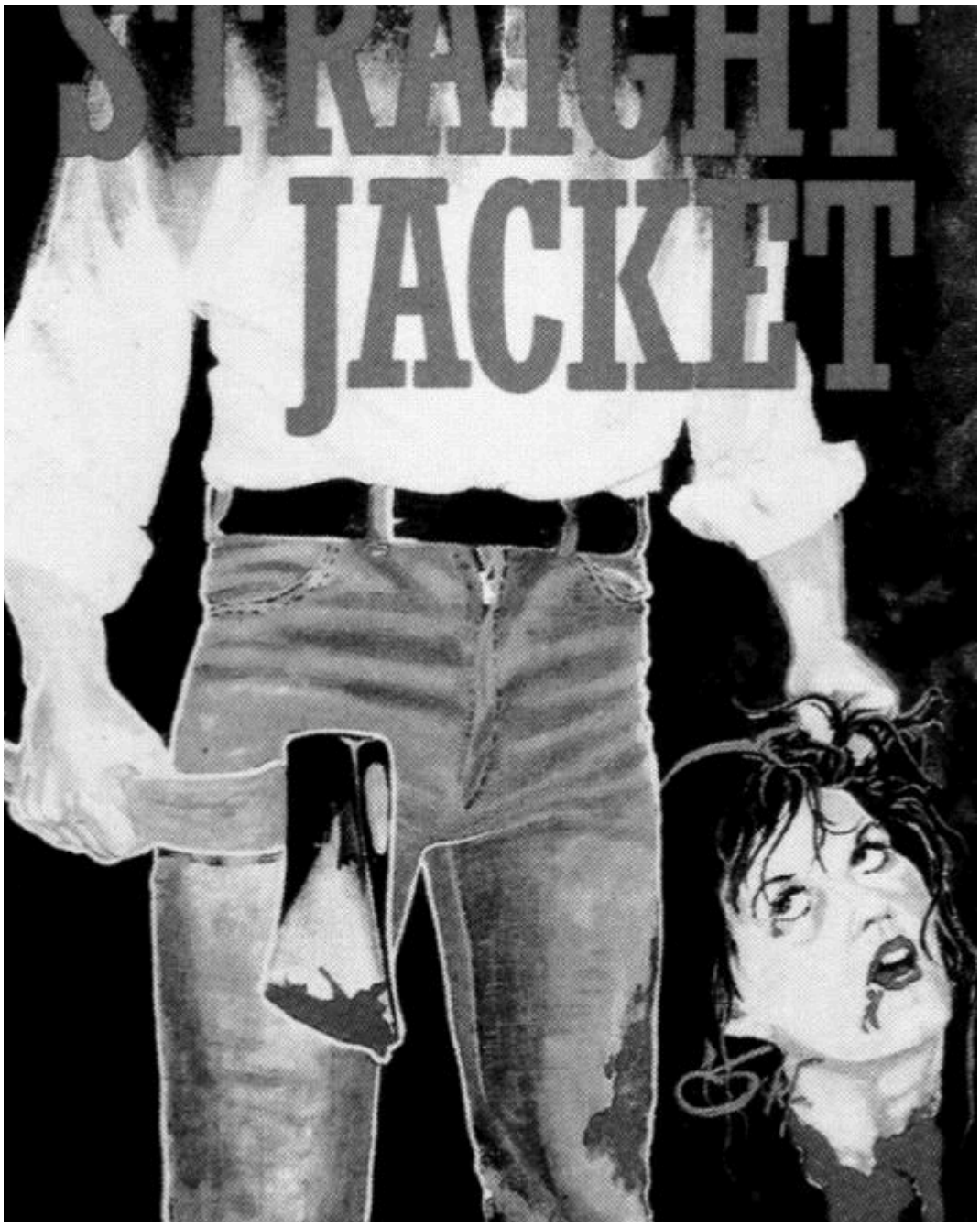
# THE STRANGENESS (1985)

**David Michael Hillman**

I like *The Strangeness.* I'd say that again if I had to.

There is a campfire. We meet seven people. Soon after, they head into an abandoned mine that was closed due to "mysterious deaths"

and “eerie legends.” Dumb luck finds our seven friends stranded in the mine. A man-eating monster keeps them there.




The first 40 minutes of *The Strangeness* follow the characters as they trek to the mine. At the start, the characters are a bit bland. We have the two “mine guys.” We have the brusque businessman and the vague geologist. There is a hard drinking “cave expert” with a

British accent. There is also a nerdy writer who is chronicling the re-opening of the mine with his wife. As the movie plays out, the characterizations take some twists and turns. For example, the businessman goes insane. The writer turns out to be selfless and brave. The dull wife turns out to be very resourceful. I thought that these characters, who seemed to be cliches, would remain so until they died. They didn't. That surprised me.

The caves are claustrophobic and creepy. You really feel like you are deep underground and trapped. It helps that all the lighting seems to be from actual on-screen sources, such as lanterns and flares. We only see what the characters see. During the closing chase, the writer's wife even uses a camera flash to light her way. That's how you light a fake cave, ladies and gentlemen! Then, there's the stop-motion animated monster, which is shaped like a penis with a big vagina mouth and tentacles flailing out of its sides. It's like a hyper-sexualized cannoli, filled with corrosive liquids instead of ricotta cheese. This thing oozes through the caves like a giant slug. It spits up acid and dissolves the characters into messy piles of white, foamy goop.

If there is a problem with this film, it's in the first 10 minutes. The pre-credits sequence feels tacked on. A couple has been hired to blow open the mine in the middle of the night. They flirt, laugh a lot, and explain in great detail why they're there. Then they get killed by something. It feels perfunctory, as if the director felt something was needed to kick start the film. But he didn't devote too much time or effort to achieve this. It doesn't even make sense in the context of the story. The monster is deep underground. Why would it attack these people right near the cave entrance? After the opening credits, there is a scene with the two "mine guys" driving to the site that pushes the exposition. Hard. They explain everything that is about to happen. It comes out sounding awkward and clumsy. But they do call the rest of the cast "turkeys." That's nice.

*The Strangeness* is low-budget filmmaking done ninety percent right. There are weaknesses here and there. But the claustrophobia of the

cave scenes and the stop-motion penis cannoli monster carry the film towards creamy strangeness goodness. (DB)

# STREETS OF DEATH (1987)

**Jeff Hathcock**

A woman attacks a few cops for no good reason. She does some kung fu. She screams, “I’m gonna kick your balls off, motherfuckers!” I’m pretty sure the cops yell, “Crazy bitch!” and then kill her. After the body is disposed of, one of the officers checks in on his partner.

“Are you all right?”

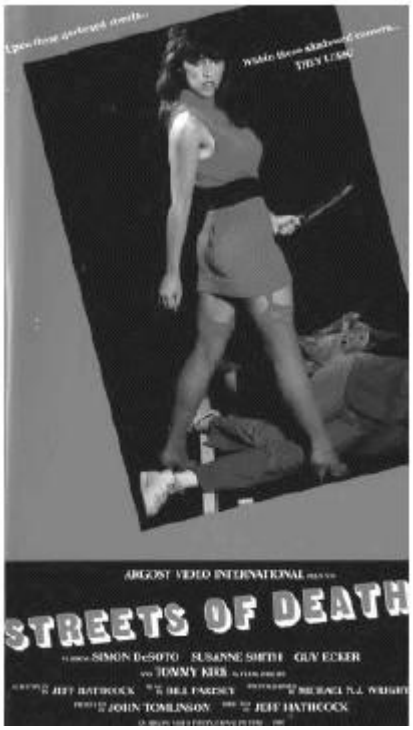
“Yeah. I’m just not so sure about my balls.”

The film cuts to a hooker propositioning a john. He flashes a wad of cash. She says, “Why don’t we discuss this over a cocktail? Your cock. My tail.”

Hathcockery. It’ll get you every time.

From 1985 to 1990, writer-director Jeff Hathcock made four sleazy movies. 1985’s *Victims!* is the most inept, and therefore most hilarious, rape-revenge film you’ll ever see (until you see *High Kicks).* I love it. *Night Ripper!,* from ‘86, is an effortless SOV slasher with a sub-plot involving glamour shots and safari bathing suits. I like it. *Fertilize The Blaspheming Bombshell,* Hathcock’s final trash film from 1990, is filled with misogyny (not the good kind) and feels like it lasts for three months. I don’t like it. And then, there’s *Streets Of Death.*

*Streets Of Death* is obscure. Really obscure. Perhaps the most obscure SOV feature film to be included in this book. Strict diligence will land you copies of Chester Turner’s works. Same with *Spine* and *Heavy Metal Massacre,* and even *Shreck.* But *Streets Of Death?* No way. Long story short, I finally obtained a copy of this film.




Upon sitting down to watch, I was, quite naturally, ready to get my balls kicked off. Why is this movie so apathetic?

*Streets Of Death* does not stray from Hathcock's previously established heraldry. Lots of empty spaces with people sitting around. Dialogue written from the perspective of an angry, genital-crazed fifteen-year-old boy. A sleazy undercurrent punctuated with occasional laughs. It's all here. And it's simple: Hookers are being murdered in Hollywood. The perps are a couple of snuff film enthusiasts. The cops must stop them. A Simmons drum machine pounds with off-beat fills while humorous sexual declarations fly at us every five minutes ("It was a pleasure sitting on your face!"). *Mickey Mouse Club* vet Tommy Kirk is seriously Going For It, as if he was getting a five dollar bonus for every word that's screamed instead of spoken. Hathcock favors placement of the camera (behind butts, inside mouths and under desks) over what the camera actually captures. A prostitute strips and spreads her legs and sings like Betty Boop for five minutes. So what's the problem?

Do you know someone who has had the same apartment for twelve years, and yet, he/she hasn't found the time to hang anything on the wall or unpack the books? So every time you visit, the mood gets gradually more depressing? Well, *Streets Of Death* feels a lot like that. Hathcock delivers on the sleaze and dream-like rhythms, but there seems to be something else on his mind. The film looks ugly, repeats itself often, and fails to take us someplace memorable – all telltale signs of someone who doesn't care. *Victims!* and *Night Ripper!* don't feel that way. They have energy. *Fertilize,* on the other hand, is dispassionate. Which means that *Streets Of Death* falls somewhere in the middle. It transitions Hatchcock's work in the same way that *La Chinoise* transitioned Jean-Luc Godard's youthful exhilaration *(Une Femme Est Une Femme)* into exhausting politics *(Tout Va Bien).* It also means this:

You'd better check your balls. (JZ)

# STUDENT BODIES (1981)

**Mickey Rose**

"I'm going to kill next at the football game. Click." "Did you just hang up?" "No. I just said 'CLICK.'"

*Student Bodies* is fantastic. It is a parody of slasher films, inspired by the success of *Airplane,* but it goes off on tangents and has its own special way about it, especially in the rather odd final sequences. The fact that Paramount released a parody of slasher films in 1981 is a good sign that folks pretty much knew that they had a pile of cliches on their hands that were being constantly reshuffled.

I have watched *Student Bodies* seven or eight times. Every time I watch it, I expect to be disappointed. I always seem to think it starts strong and completely fades by the end. Every time I watch it, I discover that I'm wrong. Yes, it has its share of dud jokes and flat moments. But it's solid throughout. Not always laugh-out-loud funny but always interesting.

“Ladies and gentlemen, the Lamab High Marching Band! The finest marching band on this street at this moment!”

Lamab High is having its Big Day: the day of the Big Parade, the Big Game, and the Big Dance. And, thanks to two murders the night before, the day of the Big Funeral! So, every school-related slasher event we need gets visited. The opening scene is right out of *Halloween* with the babysitter getting creepy phone calls and then her boyfriend visiting for sex. In fact, everyone spends much of the movie visiting each other for sex, except for Toby Badger. She doesn’t have sex but, I’ll be darned, she winds up at the scene of almost every crime. Is she the killer?

I always forget all the meta-goofing off that goes on during this film. The body count is registered on-screen. The film stops twice and goes off on little tangents. The first of these gets the movie its rating and is fantastic. There are captions on screen that point out cliches in action. I also forgot that the killer, “The Breather,” is really funny. He fades away as the movie goes on, which is too bad, but his ramblings until that time are pretty darn good.

There is one rather strange thing in the structure and tone of the film that does always surprise me. If this film was done in total *Airplane*-style, it would stick to the parody of its chosen genre to the end. But it doesn’t. I think that’s one of the reasons why I’ve always had a soft spot in my movie-watcher’s brain for this one.

The film goofs along and goofs along. About 65 minutes in, we are at the Big Dance. The Prom Queen competition has been canceled because all the contestants but one have been murdered. So the remaining contestant and the school hunk go to the woodshop to have sex. The scene is odd. There don't seem to be a lot of jokes in it. The generally amusing woodshop teacher is seen hiding in a closet and sweating. The hunk leaves and the killer arrives. All the killings have been ridiculous up to this point. And this one is too, sort of. The woman turns and says, "Oh, it's you. You brought me my crown." And she is killed. For that moment, *Student Bodies* is indistinguishable from the films it's parodying. And it does something odd to the rest of the movie.

There are jokes a-plenty from this point on and many are worth a smile or a laugh. But the film suddenly has a bit of a mean spirit to it. Toby is chased wildly down a school hall but it's not a scene from any slasher film. The final funeral has a good joke in it, but the scene itself is dark. The last five minutes in particular seem to be from a very bleak movie. It almost goes to a place where it doesn't make sense but not quite. Making the end of a slasher parody unpredictable is not a bad thing. It's just weird. Thank goodness for weird. *Student Bodies* makes me laugh and it makes me want to show it to a friend. I think that's enough. (DB)

# SUFFER, LITTLE CHILDREN (1983)

**Alan Briggs**

We are in England. We are in the Sullivan's Children's Home For Orphans. Maurice and a lady, who I'd thought was also named Maurice, take care of all the kids. One day, a mute girl named Elizabeth shows up on their doorstep. She has a strange glint in her eye. Bad stuff begins to happen.

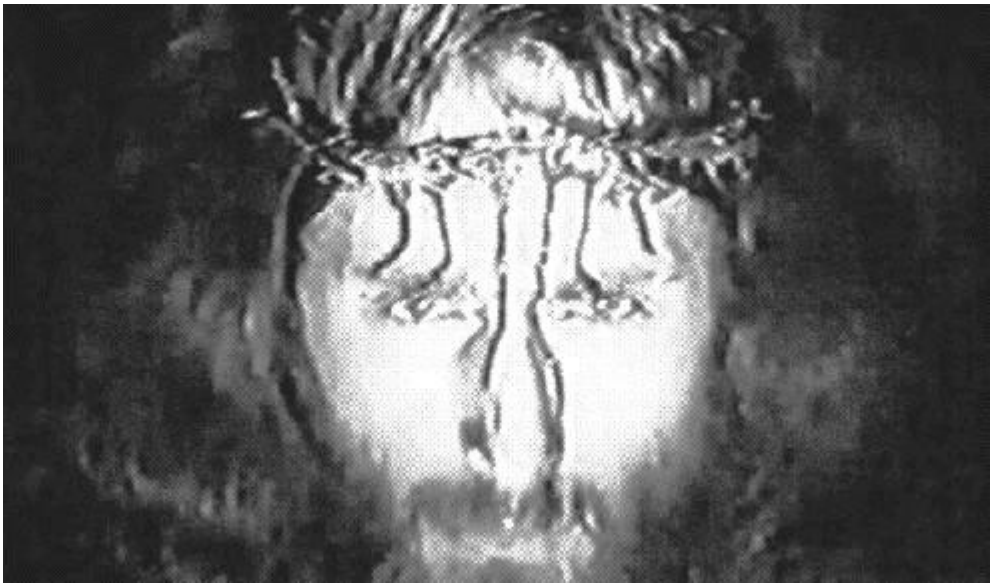
*Suffer, Little Children* was made as a special SOV project by the Meg Shanks Acting School in London. They gave their students a chance to act. Then, they generously gave themselves a chance to make a couple bucks off of the video sales. It was 1983 and the

genre they chose for their film was horror. They wrote their script, assembled their students, and turned on the camcorder.

The movie is not perfect. There are elements that don't work. The acting is a bit suspect here and there. The camera does nothing but point directly at whatever's happening. There is a section where "six children almost drown" but it's all described after the fact. That was not so great. And, even though the film is only 74 minutes long, there are moments that drag. When nothing seems to be happening or when folks are chatting and you can't hear them over the roar of the kids, you'd be forgiven for turning it off. But patience will win the day here.

There is generally enough incident to keep things moving. There are moments of violence and peril that are surprising, like a girl stabbing her leg, causing blood to spray all over a wall. The last 15 minutes enter a strange strobe light area filled with gore and a cameo appearance by Jesus Christ. It goes from over-the-top, with kids chanting "Come, Devil, come!," to disconcerting-but-awesome, thanks to those high speed strobe lights and a hell of a lot of kids screaming and thrashing around. The return of The Messiah only adds to the overall chaos.

For some reason, I thought I'd really dislike this and be bored to tears. Let's just say that my eyes welled up but tears never fell. (DB)



# THE SUPERNATURALS (1986)

**Armand Mastroianni**

I was going to start this review with “The blandishments of this film were astounding and complete.” But, I thought I might be using the word wrong so I looked it up. Suddenly, I found myself wrapped up in a mighty entertaining linguistic scuffle. But let me talk about the film real quick.

A group of soldiers go to the middle of the woods for maneuvers of some sort. Their presence awakens the spirit of a witch-woman from the Civil War. She sends a group of Civil War soldier zombies to kill them. It one of the most competent films in this book. That isn’t really a good thing.

The acting, the story, the look of the film, the scares, the zombies – all 100% competent. Yes, the characters are pretty cliched but they’re there so the zombies can have someone to kill. In the end, we’re talking about a film that stays on a well-trodden path and provides a thoroughly average, slightly dull viewing experience.

I don’t mean to sound disingenuous but “competence” is not what we’re looking for here. We want the extremes. “Sheer cinematic

beauty" or "screaming bat-shit nuts." Competence is for your grandma. Send her this movie.

And we return to my "blandishments."

I had wanted to use the word as if the "bland" in "blandishments" was literal. "Blandishments" were very bland things waved high on a flag for all to see. And this film is loaded with them. But the word doesn't mean that. It refers to things used to entice you into something. So I suppose "The blandishments were very bland" would work. Or, even better, "The blandishments of this film fail to entice."

So the blandishments of this film fail to entice. It never really does much but take up 80-odd minutes of time. It never has that moment that makes you look up towards the heavens with arms outstretched singing "Hallelujah!" Trust me; I get very little joy from not liking a film. Being bland or boring will bring me down every time. Darnit, *The Supernaturals,* I thought you were both. (DB)

# SURVIVAL 1990 (1985)

**Peter McCubbin**

The big box cover of *Survival 1990* features a junior high pencil drawing of a half-naked woman brandishing a bow and arrow. The guy to her left is decked out in camouflage. He's also shooting a machine gun. A nuclear explosion is happening in the background. The tagline promises "Humans vs. Mutants . . . Meltdown and Chaos!"

*Survival 1990* is another mid-80s made-for-TV film from Canada's Emmeritus Productions *(Shock Chamber; Blue Murder; The Tower).* You might hope that this film feeds from the same post-apocalyptic trough as the resplendent *Splatter: Architects Of Fear.*

Both are Canadian. Both advertise mutants. Both are SOV. Sadly, not all of Canada's children are created equal.

In 1986, a bomb blew up the world. No big deal. Three people, a pair of boat shoes, and part of the Casiogasmic score from *Black Devil Doll From Hell* survived. Miranda (loincloth) and John (boat shoes, Daisy Dukes) defend their home (two brick walls in an empty parking lot) against The Vandals. The Vandals are bad guys. Miranda can't remember anything past 1986. Therefore, she is deemed a "mutant." She also asks questions: Why do we have winter? Where is the salt? What is a lawnmower? When Simon shows up with his machine gun, everyone becomes friends. Miranda goes skinny-dipping. At 52 minutes, The Vandals show up. Simon engages in hair-raising hand-to-hand combat. There is an axe murder. Can I get another nuke?

*Survival 1990* is what happens if you take Larry Buchanan's tedious 1960s failure, *In the Year 2889,* stretch it out for three days, "update" it for the 80s, and add an offscreen axe murder. Basically, a few remedial actors sit around and act melodramatic for 80 minutes, while the sounds of fake owls and real locusts play in the background. That's really it. There's no plot, no blood, no personality, no laughs, no meltdown, no chaos, and no mutants. Survival of the shittiest. (JZ)

# TALES FROM THE QUADEAD ZONE (1987)

**Chester N. Turner**

Chester Novell Turner, where in the world were you?

Here's an infallible theory. SOV horror films in the 1980s were busted out to get feet in doors, mess around, or make money. Sometimes it

worked on all accounts *(Blood Cult),* but more often than not, nothing happened *(Venus Flytrap).* Every SOV spectacle from that golden era could be examined and rationalized along those lines. Until now.

*Tales From The Quadead Zone,* a three-story anthology, is Chester N. Turner's second and final dig into self-released SOV sludge. Following up the exhausting-yet-hilarious filth of *Black Devil Doll From Hell* (1984), Turner and friends are in a very distinctive place. They honed the skillz, cut the sex, and unwittingly churned out the

greatest SOV trash film of all time. No exceptions. Logic, be it godly or mortal, has gone missing during *Quadead's* 62 deranged minutes. Therefore, we must be prepared for anything. Don't knock 'em for the plastic Casiotone. Take heed of the ceramic titty-mug. In the mind of Chester Turner, these things may be the substance of life.

A swirl of comic book credits and psychotic, ass-shaking beats usher us into the Quadead Zone. A woman (Shirley L. Jones, returning from *Black Devil Doll)* reads stories from the Quadead Zone book to her son, Bobby. Bobby is an invisible ghost. He communicates with Shirley by whispering "Sha-sh-sh-sh-sha!" and blowing in her hair (she seems to have wind-gasms when this happens). "Food For ?" tells the tale of eight white trash yokels and their quest for five sandwiches. And the unfortunate introduction of a shotgun. In "The Brothers," Ted (Keefe L. Turner, brother of Chester) and Fred steal Ted's brother's dead body from the Brown-Rawls Funeral home. Fred says, "Fuck you want a dead body for, man?" Ted replies with something that sounds like "Bambtwow!" Ted's brother does not enjoy being dressed as a clown. Finally, Shirley's wraparound story becomes our third adventure, "Unseen Vision." Daryl, Shirley's husband, arrives home, then proceeds to beat the shit out of her with the Quadead book. He says, "Goddamn fool crazy muthafucka dirty bitch, shit!," then gets stabbed. Keyboard twee. Razor blade. Video ghosts. The credits say "TALES FROM THE QUADEAD ZONE WILL RETURN." I await forever.

Rules of language, structure, and general awareness do not exist in the Quadead Zone. It's a tight package of non-stop delirium. People speak in tongues that escape the radar of historical linguists. Chester Turner's homemade score (some of which is recycled from *Black Devil Doll,* but re-recorded) drowns out everything at all times. Hilarity forces you to pause for breath (Ted and Fred's jive talk sessions) before disturbing grit-gore pummels you into submission (Daryl vs. Shirley). Surprises hide beneath every plastic-covered couch and dirt floor basement.

The novelty of 1980s SOV trash films lies in their associative, regional-vérité qualities; real people making movies on their own terms and having fun. *Quadead* looks real enough, and that's the stinger. The structure and technical decisions in the film are so unbelievable that Turner and company had to be either "touched" or oblivious in their manic creativity. In other words, splash cold water on your face – this is really happening. When that mindset hits, the film is elevated above the expected SOV expectations; *Tales From The Quadead Zone* is incredibly effective with its bad decisions and equally defective. The original intent baffles to no end, but one thing's for sure: This is an experience that can never be replicated or equaled. The theme song cinches it. (JZ)

# TALES OF THE THIRD DIMENSION (1984)

**Worth Keeter, Thom McIntyre & Earl Owensby**

This anthology film is made up of a trio of 3-D stories introduced by a decaying corpse named Igor. Igor has risen from his coffin to regale us in quasi-Rod Serling tones. Five buzzards sit on nearby branches waiting to grab a piece of Igor. Three of them are the buzzard Three Stooges. The other two are channeling Laurel & Hardy. Igor tells the story of an adoption agency getting a child for Count Dracula, two greedy men trying to steal jewelry from corpses and the Christmas when Grandma runs out of anti-crazy meds.

The world of Igor's grave and the buzzards on the trees are exactly what I expected graveyards at night would look like as a child. When Igor extends his head towards us in 3-D, a creeping fear spread up my neck. When he extends his hand and then his eye shoots out, that's icing on the cake. Igor may be a puppet with limited mobility but I was convinced that he was an authentic decaying corpse. The buzzards may not be doing the best impressions but their appearance was an unexpected extra. Icing on the icing.

The third tale is the one that stays in my mind after a viewing. In the week leading up to Christmas, two children are left with their grandma. Their parents are in Honolulu. Grandma runs out of pills

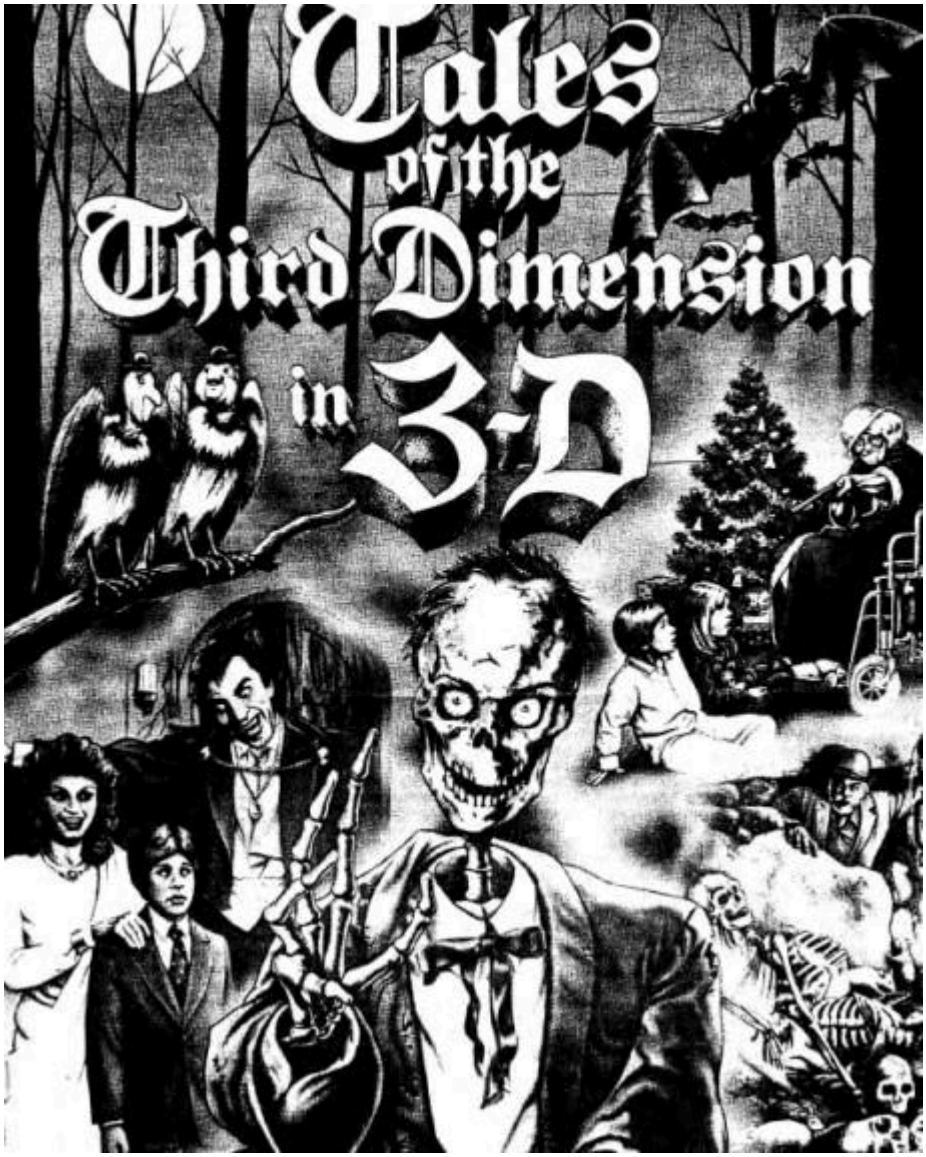
and begins getting moody and crazy. The children, especially the little girl, are quite charming and funny. The woman playing Grandma, who also played Lily's grandma in *House Of Death,* is great as a nice, lonely lady who didn't get a prescription filled. She goes from yelling at the kids to putting rat poison in cocoa. She ends up chasing them around the house with a shotgun. The closing of the tale is wonderfully absurd. The kids are saved by a certain jolly, fat man. He kicks some ass and leaves some gifts.

The linking material with Igor and the third segment overwhelm the first two stories. The first segment goes on a little too long and the ending reminded me of the final tale in *Gallery Of Horror.* It's not bad, just not great. The second tale is better. There is some nice crypt atmosphere. But it makes a mistake of promising "unimaginable horrors" and then not delivering. The third story has so much more energy that it feels like a separate entity, like a short film that got pulled into this anthology. The tales get better as they go and that's the way it should be. If you get a chance to see *Tales Of The Third Dimension,* do. It will leave you on a high. (DB)

# TERRIFYING TALES (1989)

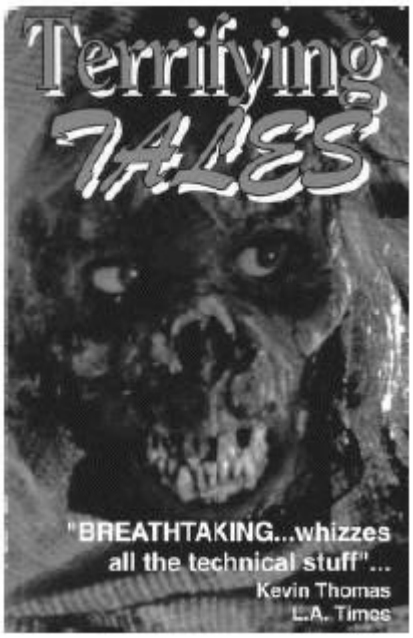
**Armand Garabidian, Paul Bunnell & Ephraim Schwartz**

*Terrifying Tales* was so goddamn terrifying that MNTEX Entertainment couldn't reproduce images from the film on the box cover. Instead, they used a still from *Creepshow.* Stephen King and George Romero sued for $1.80. They settled for $1.30. MNTEX still went belly-up.




Box art follies, part two. The cover quote reads, “BREATHTAKING . . . whizzes all the technical stuff.” Come again? I’ve checked with Oxford’s finest and that makes no sense. Flip to the back: “Combining the best in special effects . . . “(a painted Coke can), “chase scenes . . . “(none present), “& color cinematography” (yes, the film is in color). Red flags are flying, but never high enough. *Terrifying Tales* nips at the ass of *Ghost Stories: Graveyard Thrillers* on the scale of extreme unwatchability. That means it hurts. Please get tough.

Cobbled together from three mid-80s UCLA graduate projects (all with individual opening and closing credits), the sheer mass of inactivity in this film is enough to . . . terrify! In “Ten Seconds To Countdown,” a fleeing woman is kidnapped by NASA robots from 2025 who barf out lines like “We must ascertain the stimulus neurological particles.” There’s also an ape mask. “Final Destination: Unknown” finds The Roadside Strangler squaring off against demons from hell. The Devil has a license plate that reads “2 BEOND” and he cooks chili. Finally, “Creatures Of Habit” focuses on a prostitute, a coroner, and a retarded guy named Charlie who likes potatoes. The coroner says, “I want to know everything about you – what kinda tampons do you use?”




At this point, it’s a given that *Terrifying Tales* will bore you to death without explanation. Despite some flashy photography, that’s about the size of it. Seventy-four minutes of continual no beginnings, no middles, and no ends. The roots of anthology collections are built upon simple stories, but UCLA students were obviously too cool for that school. I hope graduation passed without incident.

“BREATHTAKING like a funeral, *Terrifying Tales* whizzes all over the technical stuff that made *Twilight Zone: The Movie* such a success.

I'd rather eat a rock." MNTEX should have hired me and saved $1.30. (JZ)

# TERROR AT TENKILLER (1986)

**Ken Meyer**

"Horror Films For Women." This is a movie about a gal named Stacy whose boyfriend is a jerk. Stacy and her best friend Jana go to Tenkiller Lake for the summer. But the boyfriend follows them and a lake resident named Tor begins to fall for Stacy. And there is murder.

And there are long scenes of the two friends talking and talking. They talk in their dorm room. They talk in the car. They talk by the lake. It's all dubbed in a fun way that makes it seem like their voices stayed behind at the dorm to chat while their bodies went to Tenkiller. The music assists this atmosphere by generally consisting of airy synths. It feels like a movie about two nice gals – one with some problems – who go to a lake to have a lazy summer. While at the lake, Stacy meets a nice man named Tor. But this is a horror movie and that nice man is a killer.

I like this movie. It is languorous and hazy in the best possible ways, like hanging out on a dock on a humid day. The killing at the beginning clues us in to the fact that this is not a light drama about ladies and their problems. Tor is never given any background except for the fact that he's a killer. That's fine but, being honest, I really, really didn't want anything getting in the way of the gals hanging out. A murderer is great, but can't he go and do something else on the other side of the lake?

In a different space, Tor would have been a jerk and threatened Stacy and Jana, but the women would have gotten out alive. Jana doesn't make it, though. Neither does the boyfriend. And, as we approach the end, everything seems to go, very languidly, out of control. The actual ending seems tacked on. The closing moments on the boat seem like a foregone conclusion. And the final freeze

frame might make sense but it steps out of a different movie, just like the rather violent killings.

From a distance, *Terror At Tenkiller* seems to promise little. Too few characters for a slasher. A lack of scares and suspense. A lack, frankly, of much actually happening. But the closer you draw to the movie, the more interesting it becomes. The rhythm of the movie matches up perfectly to the natural rhythm of sitting on a dock in the summer and you might fall asleep. But it's OK. The gals won't mind and you can always watch the rest later. (DB)

# TERROR ON TAPE (1983)

**Robert Worms III**

Here's even more proof that everyone involved in the early 80s video boom was stark, raving awesome.

*Terror On Tape* is a true artifact. It's a compilation tape courtesy of big box kings Continental Video, showcasing the most depraved scenes from a majority of their licensed horror films. Essentially, it's to the obsessed horror fan what porn is to the sex fiend: an overload of what the company thinks you want. Therefore, home video audiences in 1983 must have been begging for shitloads of gore and just a tiny bit of sex. Why else would this utterly desensitizing chunk of stupidity even exist? Right, so Continental could pocket a few bucks. In this case, a stream of out-of-context extreme violence and tits blasting off the screen was akin to paydirt. But not for me. I was so grossed out at the halfway point that I fast-forwarded through the

remainder of the tape. If it wasn't for Cameron Mitchell's SOV bumper segments – wait. Cameron Mitchell? Drunk? Mumbling about anything that comes to mind to the tune of a kiddie Halloween LP? Paydirt.

Out in the streets of Encino, CA lies the "Shoppe Of Horrors Video Store." It's a tacky set with lots of dry ice, plastic spook-show props, and a warehouse full of Continental videos. Overlooking the premises is Uncle Cam, decked out in fifty layers of pancake makeup and seemingly drunk as hell. And why not? It's Halloween night! Mr. Mitchell summons the power of the gods with his acting nobility and plays clips on his tiny Zenith for three customers. There's a nerd who gets gray hair as a result. A construction worker wants to be scared but "turned on first, from women with no clothes on!" And then,vampire lady Michelle Bauer equates being frightened with an orgasm ("I'm ready. Do it to me!"). Cameron walks around the place and refers to a couple of plastic skulls as Mommy, Daddy and Uncle Frank. Dumbfounded yet?

I think you get the point. All that's left is a clip shout-out. Expect the goopiest from the following trashers: *Return Of The Alien's Deadly Spawn, Vampire Hookers, Bloodtide, Cathy's Curse, Madhouse Mansion, Frozen Scream, To The Devil A Daughter* (Filthy!), *Eerie Midnight Horror Show, Kidnapping Of The President* (What?), *Nightmare* (Even filthier!), *The Slayer, City Of The Walking Dead, Color Me Blood Red, 2000 Maniacs, Scalps, Blood Feast, Ruby, Night Creature,* and *Suicide Cult.* There's also a sex montage.

*Terror On Tape* is rife with ma 'n' pa nostalgia, but you'll need an iron-lined stomach to get through it. Still, that doesn't diminish the sheer awesomeness of the concept itself. "BANNED IN CANADA!" (JZ)

# TERROR ON TOUR (1980)

**Don Edmonds**

*Terror On Tour* just finished up. I think I have an STD.

When you're on tour, baggies of cocaine strewn across gigantic tits are as common as autographed guitar picks. Just ask The Clowns. Portrayed by real-life band The Names (Rick Styles, Chip Greenman, Rich Pemberton, Dave Galuzzo aka the best names on earth), The Clowns have amazing exploits while on tour. These exploits are well documented in *Terror On Tour.* Even if the band isn't actually on tour. But who cares? When you've got dumb people reciting their lines badly while impersonating KISS, there's no room for complaints. Or is there?

Accompanied by greasepaint, thick Chicago accents, and onstage gore theatrics, The Clowns are finally "making it" after years of "paying our dues." The groupies love 'em ("You're better than The Beatles or The Kiss!"), the hipsters party with 'em (John Wintergate and Kalassu from *Boardinghouse* show up for a food fight), and the promoters don't get 'em. Probably because they sound like Cheap Trick covering Cheech & Chong's "Earache My Eye." Beneath the coke and bodily fluids, someone pretending to be a Clown is picking off groupies after each show. Two drunk cops are on the case. A fat roadie may or may not be putting on Clown make-up to get laid. All of the shows take place at the same venue.

Contrary to the excess on hand, *Terror On Tour* isn't a crotch-ripping slasher-rock masterpiece. Coming from director Don Edmonds, who helmed a couple of the less-than-thrilling *Ilsa* films, that's not surprising. The film wallows in filthy excess, but never gets explicit. We see the cocaine and bloody noses. We don't see the sex. That might be a good thing. Who wants to see a blow job on the piss-stained bathroom floor of a club? The synth-blasts are always welcome, as are the brief sequences of The Clowns performing their terrible songs. But small details can't wash away the bigger problems. If I want synths plus a band performing terrible songs plus a good time, I'll watch *Rocktober Blood. Terror On Tour* buries its beneficial elements with unattractive situations and photography, and a lack of enthusiasm on all fronts. It is not a good time.

Still, the existence of films like this fascinate me to no end. I love the fact that someone preserved their dream of a rock and roll murder fantasy on film. I just wish my pee didn't hurt so bad after watching it. (JZ)

# THEY DON'T CUT THE GRASS ANYMORE (1985)

**Nathan Schiff**

Two Texas gardeners, Billy Buck and Jacob, don't like the yuppies of Long Island. The yuppies spend all of their time being materialistic or talking about themselves. They treat the Texas boys with contempt. What else can some good old boys do? The Texans begin to murder the yuppies in long, protracted scenes filled with animal guts and skulls. These scenes are emulating the intensive gore of H.G. Lewis's work, specifically *The Wizard Of Gore* and *The Gore Gore Girls.* Throw in a bit of social commentary about how rotten the yuppies are, and you've got a Nathan Schiff film that's tough to watch.

Faces are pulled apart. A woman is shot in the groin. A dog rushes up and eats some of the aftermath. A body is cut up and reduced to a pile of mess. The camera sits and lingers. Dummies filled with guts are yanked apart. Billy Buck and Jacob are delighted by what they're doing. The gore scenes aren't very realistic but they are so drawn-out and unflinching that they left me with a queasy feeling. There's no finesse to it. It's just a chunky red mess.

Things like this happen when creative people are forced to rush. If they don't have the time needed to review or polish the work, they may leave in things that should have been left behind. *They Don't* feels like it was rushed. It's like The Beach Boys' "Shut Down Vol. 2." That album contained twelve songs. Not all of them are successful. Capital Records demanded constant output from Brian Wilson and the boys. So, for every perfect pop song ("Don't Worry Baby"), there would be a track that caused nothing but confusion, like " 'Cassius Love' vs. 'Sonny' Wilson." That "song" was three and a half minutes of Mike Love and Brian

Wilson arguing in the studio. Why on earth would a track like this be put on a summer album for teens in 1964? My contention is that it wouldn't have been if Brian Wilson hadn't been so rushed at that time. The same goes for Nathan Schiff.

The earlier Schiff films, like *Long Island Cannibal Massacre,* certainly had gore. They also had stories to them. They felt like actual movies that were planned out. *They Don't Cut The Grass Anymore* isn't like that. The moments of satire, with the killers' hatred for yuppie culture,

never develop. If they had been fleshed out, we may have relished the murders of these unpleasant people in the same way that Billy Buck and Jacob do. Instead, gore scenes go on and on past the point of interest. There are no characters to sympathize with. After 70 minutes, I feel like I've been wandering through the brain of a deranged man with a deadline of yesterday. In the right mindset, that could be fascinating. Fascinating, but not entertaining. (DB)

# THINGS (1989)

**Andrew Jordan**

An actual conversation within my brain during the first 15 minutes of *Things:*

"Dan, what's going on here?"

"Dan, I have no idea."

"Dan, that's good enough for me."

Strange experiments make a woman give birth to "things" that look like rat-sized ants with grotesque teeth. The monsters swarm inside the nooks and crannies of a house in a Canadian no-man's land. At the same time, two meathead guys drink beer that "tastes like cow shit." The Things attack! The guys argue!

Someone spontaneously combusts! Important things happen but several of these things happen off screen. There are long stretches of the guys and the scientist who created the creatures just sitting at a kitchen table and talking. And walking through the house. Sometimes I knew where they were going. Sometimes I fell asleep for what felt like hours and they were still going wherever it was that they were going. Porn star Amber Lynn chimes in with news announcements that might relate to the action if you think about it long enough.

I never, ever felt like I really knew what was going on in *Things.* I never felt “close” to the film in any way, as in “it might exist on the Planet Earth where I live.” The film has quite a bit of 1990s *Burning* Moon-style gore for gore’s sake. There is a lengthy scene in *Things* that involves the torturing of a man. His hand is cut off, his tongue is ripped out, and his eyes are removed. The scene’s connections to the main action of the film are minimal. It’s very similar to the over-the-top “Hell” sequence from *Burning Moon* that goes on for ages and consists mainly of people getting ripped apart. I used to love that sort of thing in high school. But as an adult, it doesn’t really interest me. As all the gore piles up, I realized that what I love about *Things* is the very chatty opening half. After that, it stays intensely disconnected but I don’t quite love it as much. For some viewers, the second half’s gore parade might be the point of the whole movie. But it’s not as essential as the meandering first half. Strange men saying odd things have always interested me and the strange men saying odd things in *Things* are no different.

*Things* exists in one of those off-putting, idiosyncratic places, the likes of which will never be seen again. The whole shebang is fascinating. It looks like it was filmed by a fourth grader with a Super 8 camera that had a broken viewfinder. The lighting is composed of one lamp with green, blue and red bulbs that were changed at random. The sound rarely matches up with the picture. *Things* rests precariously between the unintentional creativity of the 1980s home video horror revolution and the gory, self-obsessed 1990s free-for-all. Neither side really wins out. There is a possibility that “the viewer wins” but that’s unclear. Watch *Things* and you might be reduced to tears of joy. Or pain. Only you will know for sure. (DB)

# THURSDAY THE 12th (1982)
# aka PANDEMONIUM

### Alfred Sole

R-rated movies were a problem when I was a kid. It was the early 80s. HBO ruled our house. I could only watch R-rated films if I had

permission from my mom, like *An American Werewolf In London,* or if she was asleep, like *Porkys 2: The Next Day.* She would peruse the HBO guide and the description of what the film featured. If there was nudity, I was asked to look away. If there was sex or too much swearing, the film could get turned off. Violence didn't seem to matter too much but gore did.

PG-rated movies were a breeze. If it was on during the day, it was all right. That's what my ma thought and, frankly, that's what I thought. So seeing the PG-rated *Thursday The 12th* was no problem. It lacked nudity and gore, had only a few swear words, and contained some silly violence. It seemed like a Mel Brooks movie to me. I was a kid who liked some laughs and scares. This film was perfect.

Years ago, at It Had To Be U, a cheerleading academy, a well-thrown javelin killed several cheerleaders. Today, a once-rejected cheerleader named Bambi has reopened the academy. Her first round of students arrives: Candy, Sandy, Andy, Randy, Mandy and Glenn Dandy. But that killer is still around. And the killing begins again.

When I was a kid, I read all about slasher films but was always too scared to watch them. Then, I was able to watch a spoof of one. And, for some reason, I remember being disturbed. Maybe because characters were actually killed? Maybe because, in order to get the PG rating, the filmmakers had to make some odd choices that ended up making me squirm. Bambi taking a bath in milk, dipping cookies in it, and eating them was one example. Another was the giant toothbrush drill that goes into Mandy's mouth and makes a huge mound of foam ooze out. Maybe I was a wuss. That's a possibility.

Although some of these feelings still hang on to me, *Thursday The 12th* is really a rather straightforward spoof with a few odd moments laced throughout. It's filled with folks you'll recognize, like Carol Kane, Tommy Smothers, Paul Reubens, and Judge Reinhold. It has some laugh-out-loud moments, like the "House of Bad Pies" scene, which still makes me guffaw like a nut. It has a few parody moments that drop in from different worlds to keep you on your toes. Specifically, I'm thinking of the Nelson Eddy and Jeanette MacDonald duet. Were a lot of teens big fans of those two in the early 80s? And, the real test of a spoof: it never flags. This movie keeps a constant steady flow of amusement going for 82 minutes. That's all you need. (DB)

# TO ALL A GOODNIGHT (1980)

**David Hess**

David Hess was in this movie called *The Last House On The Left.* You may have heard of it. He also directed this movie called *To All A Goodnight.* You probably haven't heard of it. It's time for a Hessterectomy.

We can all agree that David Hess is the most loveable badass asshole in the history of cinema. In his hands, the act of joyless rape becomes a work of art on par with Balzac's *La Comedie Humaine,* Clementi's sonatinas, and Chaplin's *The Gold Rush.* If you watch his 1970s "rape trilogy" from beginning to end (The *Last House On The Left; House On The Edge Of The Park; Hitch Hike)* and do not wish that he was your father, you should think about where your life went so horribly wrong. Hess does not appear in *To All A Goodnight.* For that reason, there is no rape in this film. David Hess would never sign on a contract for a film that had rape in it unless he was doing the raping. Look it up.

In lieu of rapes, *To All A Goodnight* gives us a killer Santa Claus. It's proof that Hess was much better at raping than at directing. Of course, the fact that he forgot to bring lights to the set is one of the

reasons why this film so charming. That, and a severed head attached to a shower faucet.

Welcome to the Calvin Finishing School For Girls. It's Christmas break. There are palm trees and no snow. Sorority bitches are in full effect. They spike their housemother's tea with tranquilizers, act dramatic, and prepare for sex with random dudes. A private jet lands. The dudes are inside. There's an acoustic guitar that serves an important role in the film for unknown reasons. People start to do it on a ping-pong table. But then, a killer in a frightening see-through Santa Claus mask starts to do what he does best. Throats are strangled. Heads are removed. Stomachs are punctured. You know what I mean. Occasionally, Santa buries his victims in mounds of dirt. A police chief touches a girl's face. A policeman in a plaid blazer gets super laid.

You can show *To All A Goodnight* to anyone and they're pretty much guaranteed to have a bad time. The point-and-shoot photography is dark. I mean, it's really dark. Like the blackest I've ever seen. The film feels stoned. Things just kind of float around and happen, making peaks and valleys indistinguishable. It's also an extremely straight-forward slasher – there's a senseless prologue, a crazy caretaker, sex-obsessed leads, minor gore and nudity, and a twist ending. You watch it once and think, "Well, I've seen it. That's what Hess can do. I don't need to watch that again because I still need to watch the Indonesian *Friday The* 13th."

Then, December hits. I'm watching *To All A Goodnight* again. It feels perfect, like nothing else in the world exists except David Hess' underwhelming slasher and me. I have no concrete explanation as to why this happens. This isn't Laurel & Hardy's *Big Business.* It's not *The World Of Henry Orient. To All A Goodnight* does not give me feelings of holiday warmth in my stomach as those films do. But the fact that I loyally return to it every year, and not *Don't Open 'Til Christmas* or *Silent Night, Deadly Night* or even *Black Christmas,* says a lot. Even when David Hess is at his worst, he's still pretty much the best. (JZ)

to all a
GOODNIGHT
SANDY COBE Presents An IWDC Film "to all a GOODNIGHT"
Starring JENNIFER RUNYON · FORREST SWANSON with LINDA GENTILE · WILLIAM LAUER
Produced by JAY RASUMNY · Directed by DAVID A. HESS · Screenplay by ALEX REBAR
Executive Producer ALEX REBAR · Associate Producer EVZEN KOLAR
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# THE TOWER (1985)

**Jim Makichuk**

Lola is a fun name, like Beulah, Lavinia, or Throckmorton. I have an Aunt Lola who is a very nice lady. In the musical *Damn Yankees,* Lola, the devil's sexy assistant, sings about wanting men's souls. That Lola reminds me of the LOLA in the Canadian SOV film *The*

*Tower.* LOLA is an energy-crazed super computer that controls the Sandawn Building, a modern high-rise in Hamilton, Ontario. One night, a group of innocent people get trapped inside the building. LOLA sees these “intruders” as fresh sources of energy that she wants. So she begins to “tap” that energy. Then, everyone dies.

The Sandawn Building is closing down for the weekend. We meet the people who are still inside. There are a couple of advertising men, a secretary, and a nerdy security guard and his girlfriend. She wears a yellow bikini. LOLA begins to eliminate everyone for their energy. Simultaneously, people spend a lot of time walking through hallways in the building. Sometimes they go up and down stairs. Sometimes they just sit down for long stretches of time. The majority of the movie seems to be nothing but these people meandering around the building.

*The Tower* is in the business of bland. It looks like it could be a fast food restaurant’s instructional video that teaches employees about restroom maintenance. Apart from walking around, the serviceable actors aren’t really given a lot to do. The flat lighting and lack of any cinematic style, beyond pointing the camera at the people on screen, tests my patience. However, whenever the film cuts to LOLA, I perk up. I like psychotic supercomputers. LOLA is no HAL but she has her charms. She speaks in a calm voice about BTUs and makes people flare up and vanish. LOLA makes me want to watch this movie again.

*The Tower* has potential. In fact, it’s a lot like the TV series *Doctor Who.* There are episodes of *Doctor Who* where all the production elements are wanting except for the story. But the story being told, or the concept behind it, makes me continue watching regardless of what’s actually happening (or not happening) on screen. The basic concept behind *The Tower* intrigues me. Then, I think of all the staircases. I think of the walking. I think of the boring shots of people standing around and talking. That makes me less eager to watch it again.

I made myself watch *The Tower* a second time, specifically for this review. After 30 minutes, I was looking around the room and humming “Whatever Lola Wants, Lola Gets” from *Damn Yankees.* Maybe I just like the name Lola? It’s an attractive word with a fun bounce on the two syllables. Even though my mind was wandering, I realized I wanted to watch the film for a third time, as I was watching it for a second time. Somewhere within *The Tower* is a film I’m going to love. LOLA wants what she wants. I’m going to get what I want. Even if it means going back to the Sandawn Building fourteen or fifteen times. (DB)

# TOXIC ZOMBIES (1980) aka BLOODEATERS aka FOREST OF FEAR

**Charles McCrann**

Some days, it doesn’t pay to harvest marijuana.

In a remote wilderness area, six hippies discover a marijuana haul that’ll have them “set for a year!” Federal agents sniff them out. Under the leadership of John Amplas *(Martin),* the government crop-dusts the area with an experimental drug called Dromax. When the hippies toke up, they morph into zombies. Zombies that use machetes. People run a lot. Insects fly around. There’s also a naked girl with a yellow bucket. She stands in the middle of a forest and gives herself a rubdown with a dirty sponge.

*Toxic Zombies* is stoned on all levels. It's one of the most blatantly lethargic zombie films I've seen since Bill Hinzman's *Flesheater.* The zombies are boring. They look like normal people who maybe haven't showered in a few days. The gore is boring. Most of it looks like red cake frosting smeared on people's faces. The pace is boring. The film reaches a climax by simply ending. Even the jittery, handheld camerawork can't help the fact that there's not much going on. If you're high when you watch it, you'll love it. You'll love anything. Even Hinzman's film. I wasn't high when I watched *Toxic Zombies,* but I still enjoyed it. There are two very simple reasons for that.

1. The people. A man and a woman rip their clothes to shreds. Then, they look at each other and engage in very calm sex. A guy tells Polish jokes. A father talks to his wife about their son: "Even if he is retarded, he's got to learn to get along in this world." And what about that son? He's either mentally challenged or constantly having an orgasm. Or maybe receiving a really great foot massage.

2. The soundtrack. Imagine if someone chose their favorite musical moments from *Halloween, Zombie,* and *Jaws.* Then, they recorded those moments through the grill of a television speaker while overlapping a Moog in the background. After that, they dubbed it all down to a cassette tape on a boombox.

Unfortunately, I can't recommend a film just because the people in it are ridiculous and the soundtrack is horribly amazing. So I won't. (JZ)

# TRAMPA INFERNAL (1989)
# aka HELL'S TRAP

**Pedro Galindo III**

R U ready for Freddy?

"Whoever kills the bear will be the winner. It's about showing the town who's the best!" That's not a bad idea. Mexico infused our late

80s cultural acumen with a psychopathic doll-midget *(Muerte Infernal)* and sympathetic clown-midgets *(Al Filo Del Terror).* But still, it wasn't enough. There was something more to prove. So what better way to communicate "WE ARE THE BEST" than producing *Trampa Infernal,* a 75 minute slasher that utilizes a Freddy Krueger-gloved killer? That's right. There is no better way.

Nacho (Brillo mullet, white stonewash jeans) always wins the paintball games. Mauricio (feathered wings, black stonewash jeans) always loses. Therefore, Mauricio accosts Nacho with the ultimate challenge: hunting a bear in the woods. And that is how you do it in Mexico. Rising to the occasion, the bros assemble a crack team (fat guy, punch-happy girlfriend, a few other dopes) and head out to show each other who's boss. Lo-fives. Paddle-ball. Fat jokes. Tent problems. A war vet/survivalist-killer named Jesse emerges from a cave. And, as legend has it, he's "still at war . . . with everybody!" As such, Jesse sports a plastic mannequin mask and wig, the knife-fingers, grenades, tear gas, and a machine gun.

Yes. A machine gun.

What if *Berserker* was really good? What if bear-hunting was a social stepping stone? What if fat guys liked to eat? Ponder no more. *Trampa Infernal* is neither high nor psychotic. It is, however, as direct and uncluttered as Mexican horror can get in the year 1989. In fact, with the frequent woods-wandering, lame characterizations, and somewhat conservative gore content, *Trampa* might even be clumped in with straight-up fools like *Demon Warrior;* all zzz's, no skeeze. But we know better. *Trampa* is an asymmetrical slasher with ridiculous plot pursuits, shameless pilfering, and the power to make you smile when Jesse's hand gets blown off (but not his misshapen Freddy glove). Incidentally, no bears appear in this motion picture. Mexico rests its case. (JZ)

# TRICK OR TREAT (1986)

**Charles Martin Smith**

Did you know that “ROCK’S CHOSEN WARRIORS WILL

RULE THE APOCALYPSE!”?

“Skippy” from *Family Ties* stars in *Trick Or Treat,* which was directed by the nerd from *American Graffiti.* It is the thrilling story of one boy’s struggle with a Heavy Metal God’s retribution on Halloween night. In this movie, Skippy has a snap-on mullet. It looks amazing. Every time he opens his locker, you can see where it’s attached to his real hair. Most of my joy in watching this film came from picking out when I could or couldn’t tell if it was a real mullet. It was never real. Also, a mom performs an erotic workout in her bedroom.

This movie is as good as it sounds.

Skippy worships rock star Sammi Curr aka the master of “Rock Pornography” aka the guy who bites snakes on stage. Skippy and his best friend Roger are bullied at school by a legion of buff dudes and an asshole named Tim. As our heroes defend themselves, they find time to say things like “Double goose eggs, dude!” Which may or may not refer to tits. Then Sammi dies. Tim humiliates Skippy in front of the girl of his dreams. Everything goes to shit. Skippy says, “I’m

gonna NAIL those guys!” An LP plays backwards and suddenly Sammi’s satanic spirit possess Skippy’s stereo. Let the nailing begin! A naked girl gets her ears (and libido) fried during a demonized Walkman attack. Sammi slings lightning bolts from his guitar at the Halloween dance. Roger waxes poetic on the beauty of call waiting.

Light on horror, but surprisingly well presented for garbage, *Trick Or Treat* is a pleasure. Think of it as a rich man’s *Black Roses.* Same concept, but with slicker photography and a touch of development. Acting isn’t terrible. Pace is even. The Halloween dance is an afterthought, but the film would suffer without it – if it wasn’t for that, we’d never see the Rambo costume. Or a boom mic.

Skippy’s social angst is the most attractive asset of *Trick Or Treat.* It makes the whole thing feel like a warm-up for *Freaks And Geeks,* if that show was scored with wall-to-wall metal obscurities instead of Rush and the theme from *Caddyshack.* With the angst placed front and center, the film feels more substantial. Almost like a real movie. But then there are three false endings. (JZ)

# TRICK OR TREATS (1982)

**Gary Graver**

*Trick Or Treats* destroys any hope of a narrative during its opening minutes. Instead, we get Chris Graver. He’s a fat kid with catch-phrases. He makes me want to saw off my ears.

Written, directed, photographed, and edited by former Orson Welles collaborator Gary Graver, *Trick Or Treats* is a warm-up for his later *Midnight Intruders.* Like *Midnight,* this film is filled with nonsense. But unlike *Midnight,* the smut element is kept to a minimum. Still, has your Halloween night ever been blessed with a performance of *Othello?* Or a last-minute flight to Vegas? How about a film editor lamenting their movie-within-a-movie anti-masterpiece? If you’re bored or frustrated, don’t worry about it. Every five minutes, the lisping Chris Graver will pipe in with a

“SUUCCKKAHHH!” and all will continue to be horrible.

Carrie Fucking Snodgrass has her husband thrown into a swimming pool and buckled into a straight jacket by asylum orderlies. Apparently, he’s “mad as a hatter.” Several years later, it’s Halloween night. The cheap cardboard decorations are out in full force. A professional babysitter named Linda is called in for duty, as Snodgrass and current husband, David Fucking Carradine, are off to Vegas for a Halloween party. Chris Graver, a miniature Brian Wilson with a Houdini fixation, spends the next hour terrorizing

Linda with fake blood and oversized novelty sunglasses. All the while, Chris’ dad, now clad in drag, stalks the streets in search of payback. Fast-forward while everyone walks around the house, but stop before the incredibly stupid freeze-frame ending.

*Trick Or Treats* makes no sense. This is a horror film with little horror and a plot that runs in circles within the first ten minutes. It’s mostly exhausting and features little in the way of technical forte. But the baffling elements kept me semi-awake. Hobos asking for dates. Nut-house scenes that escaped from an episode of *The Monkees,* if that show were produced by Al Adamson. The penis innuendoes that Chris lobs at his thirty-something babysitter (he calls it a “rocket”). There’s also some Halloween night ambience, complete with the same “fake door knocker” trick that was featured in *Pee-Wee’s Big Adventure.* Only here, it is used six times in a row. (JZ)

# TRUTH OR DARE?: A CRITICAL MADNESS (1986)

**Tim Ritter**

Suddenly, I was hit over the head and blindfolded. A voice simultaneously channeled Wormser from *Revenge Of The Nerds* and Brutus “The Barber” Beefcake.

“TRUTH OR DARE!”

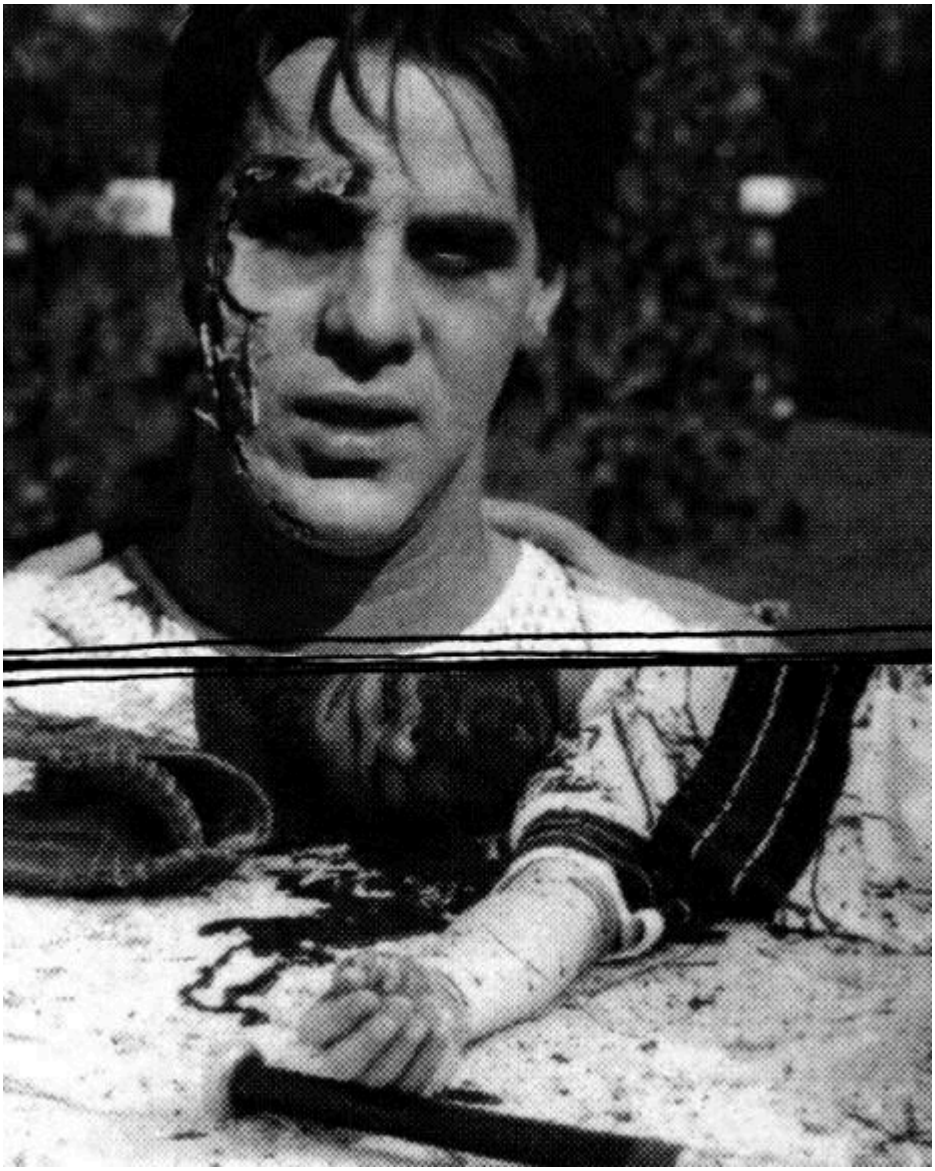
“What? Truth.”

“In my movie, *Truth Or Dare,* does a little leaguer’s face get chainsaw’d in half? Does an elderly woman get a mouthful of Uzi?”

“Um, yes? Wait. That’s two questions. Aren’t you supposed to ask me just one?”

I was then stabbed in the groin with a Rambo survival knife and hit in the right eye with some nunchucks.

I still win.



Along with fellow nutcases *Splatter: Architects Of Fear* and *Killer Workout, Truth Or Dare* proves that 1986 was a banner year for trash-horror nirvana. Because, in addition to all that button-pushing gore, this film manages to squeeze in helpful solutions to adultery (kill ‘em all), a fixation on static long shots, and the most accomplished “Hey, I’m nuts!” face contortionist since Ricky in *Silent Night, Deadly Night Part 2.* Yes, this is a critical madness. And yes, I’m laughing critically.

In “plot” and execution, *Truth Or Dare* is the more balanced cousin to *Las Vegas Blood Bath’s* desperate madness. Mike finds his wife in

bed with another man, then takes out his psychological traumas on the world. With violence. But while *Blood Bath* lives for idiotic – albeit uncomfortably hilarious – gross-outs, *Truth* exudes more passion. Teenage writer-director Tim Ritter (earlier: *Day Of The Reaper,* later: *Killing Spree)* and friends are determined to create a disturbing experience. I mean, THEY

DRIVE A CAR OVER A BABY. To a certain extent, the carnage is affecting. In form, production, and earnestness, this almost feels like a movie made by adults. But in the end, there's still a theme song that sounds like the Pointer Sisters. There's still a guy in a copper slasher mask cutting a kid's face in half with a chainsaw. And there's still the use of the title cards "13 Months Later!", "13 Days Later!" and "5 Months Later!" within fifteen minutes of each other. Exclamation points included. (JZ)

# TWISTED ISSUES (1988)

**Charles Pinion**

Skate or die. I mean it.

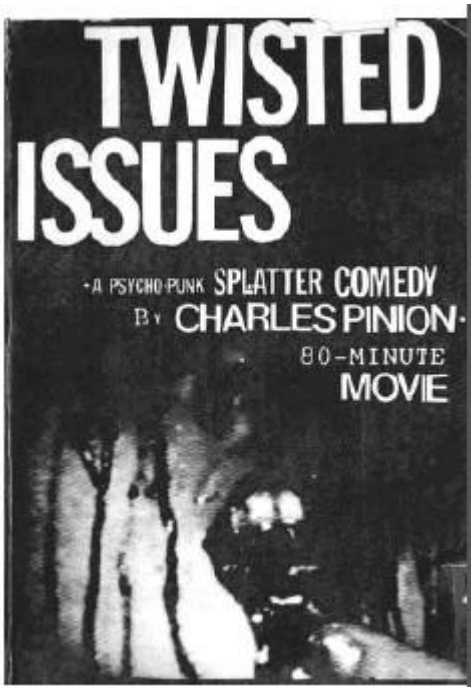
*Twisted Issues* is the debut film from underground art-barf filmmaker Charles Pinion. It has a killer with a skateboard attached to his foot and girls screaming. So, you could label it as a "slasher" without sounding like you just graduated from ass school. But the face-crushings and impalements are just there to anchor us. Pinion wasn't interested in narrative or logic. He was interested in documenting the punk/skate/thrash scene of Gainesville, Florida in the late 1980s. So *Twisted Issues* feels like an issue of *Destroy All Monsters* that was created with a camcorder instead of a Xerox machine – non sequitur after non sequitur overlap to create a snapshot of someone's life. One that is scored by Mutley Chix and Hell Witch.

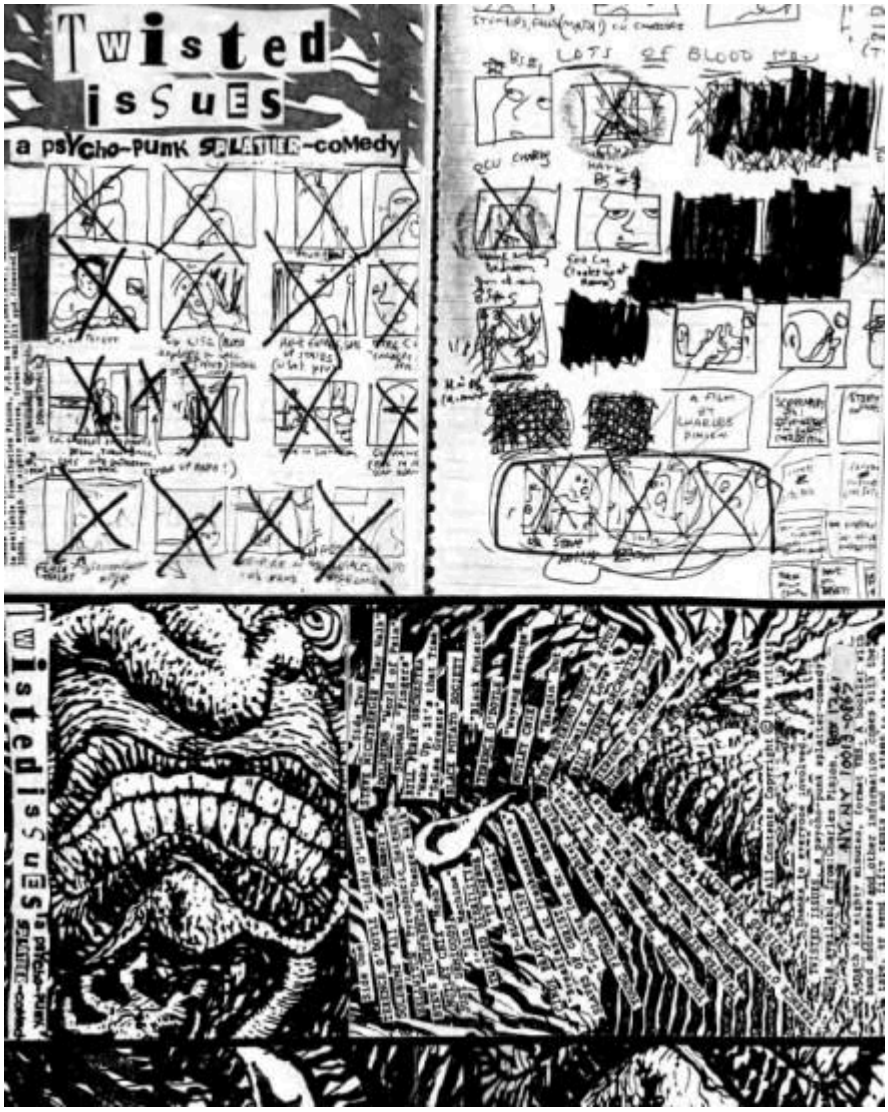
Paul wears a karate uniform and eats a hamburger on a porch. He also skates. A man in a bedroom (Charles Pinion) watches Paul on TV. He also has murder fantasies involving his girlfriend. One night, Paul says, "I need to take a shower." He attempts to skate home.

Four drunken scumbags in a sedan accost Paul in a parking lot. He uses karate kicks. They roll over him in their car. Two minutes later, a “mad scientist” (purple wig, sunglasses) and his lady friend bring Paul back to life in their laboratory. Now disfigured, Paul drills a skateboard deck onto his left foot, ties a fencing mask on his head, and embarks on a quest for revenge.

Hundreds of cigarettes and joints are smoked. Bands play house shows. Satan sells acid. Eventually, Paul ends up at Pinion’s house. Someone says, “The ability to choose is our greatest freedom!” and there is a climactic battle with guns.

Experimentation isn’t always beneficial. Have you heard Lou Reed’s *Metal Machine Music?* Have you seen Chantal Anker-man’s *Je tu il elle?* Intriguing, yes. Stimulating, no. The technical experiments of *Twisted Issues* (scenes recorded off a TV screen, colored lights, collages of television commercials and newscasts) are tolerable, but not always stimulating. The film moves quickly, even when the “actors” do not. We’re constantly bombarded with disparate sounds and images. Elephant noises. Skulls with sunglasses. The “This is your brain on drugs . . .” commercial. In turn, our attention span persists. Pinion’s creative joy is validated. He’s not doing this to have a pissing contest with the audience. He’s doing it out of raw creativity. Gerard Pires’ *Erotissimo* worked the same way. But where that film used late 60s pop-art as its foundation, *Twisted* uses bands that sound like Scratch Acid on a picnic with Beat Happening. Still, an experiment is an experiment.


TWISTED
ISSUES
-A PSYCHO-PUNK SPLATTER COMEDY
BY CHARLES PINION-
80-MINUTE
MOVIE


Twisted
issues
a psycho-punk splatter-comedy
LOTS OF BLOOD
twistedissues

*Twisted Issues* can't be broadly recommended. Its chosen niches are too divided. Slasher purists will be greeted with people quoting the Bible in a kitchen and out-of-tune guitars played through flanger pedals. Cinema vérité enthusiasts will find the same exact things. Neither will understand why they're watching it. Regardless, this movie is way better than *Thrashin'.* (JZ)

# TWISTED NIGHTMARE (1982)

**Paul Hunt**

A man erupts in rage from a sound sleep. His perm is flattened. His whitey-tighties ride. The man's name is Dean. We'll call him Dean the Dream. A woman lies nearby, inquiring about the sudden mood swing.

Dean the Dream: "Hey fuck you, Miss Perfect! And don't you EVER call me a pussy!"

Dean destroys a cot. Dean throws beer cans at hitchhikers and says, "Ha! Fuckin' asshole!" Dean refers to other men as "homeboys." Obviously, Dean is a blessed individual. He is the Dream. He also has friends. Lots of 'em. Hence, the crux of *Twisted Nightmare* is revealed: never, ever underestimate the power of good company.

Several special couples find a card in their mail that reads: "You have won a free weekend at Camp Paradise." Campfire embers?

Indian curses? No way. Plot, names and continuity recede into a backdrop of blood, boobs, and cabins. Everyone dies via antler impalements (hiya, *Silent Night, Deadly Night),* feet-through-the-chest, and teleportation. The killer might be a retarded kid seeking revenge, but that information is trivial. Especially when your face is flowing with tears of laughter.

Forget about the flubbed lines, New Age country licks, wandering boredom, and boozed-up photography. *Twisted Nightmare* is all about our new friends and their remarkable lifestyles. Starting with Dean the Dream and never stopping, the film delivers an incomparable treasure trove of 80s imbeciles. The buff Korean guy with a weapons fetish ("I brought my whole arsenal"). The multicultural, multimulleted sauna orgy. The Britney Spears look-a-like with major wig difficulties. Eventually, you'll beg for air. The slo-mo declarations of "NOOOOO!" will afford you none. After all, what are friends for?

*Twisted Nightmare* is boring, but endlessly hilarious. But don't tell Dean I said that. He'd kick my pussy ass for sure. (JZ)

# UNHINGED (1982)

**Don Gronquist**

I've always wondered what it would be like to live in a huge mansion with servants, psychotic rages, and murder. Now I've got my chance.

En route to a rock concert, Terry and her two friends hit a log with their car. This sends them careening into a ditch. The girls wake up at the Penrose family mansion deep in the woods. Old Mrs. Penrose hates men. With the exception of a handyman who is a necessary evil, she won't allow males in the house. Mrs. Penrose's daughter, Marion, seems to be cracking under the strain of her mother's wrath. Marion also looks old enough to be her mother's sister. Terry and the girls are told, "There isn't a phone for two miles!" so they decide to stay a few days and recover. In the walls, late at night, Terry can hear a voice. It sounds like a man mumbling. Then, something begins to kill everyone. Violently.

Despite its reputation as a UK Video Nasty, *Unhinged* isn't terribly high on incident. It relies more on a creeping sense of eeriness that builds due to the secluded mansion, constant nighttime rainstorms, and Mrs. Penrose's rantings. The film complements all of this with a sparse, atmospheric synth score. It's reminiscent of the synth

soundtrack from *The Boogeyman,* but more disconcerting in terms of specific sounds. There are also smaller, more individual elements that add to the film's appeal. Terry and her friends look sedated throughout. They only look alive or engaged when they're about to die. At all other times, they appear to have been shot up with muscle relaxers. Then there's the pre-accident drive through deep wooded areas. It somehow frightens me. This might have something do with the overhead shots of the car winding along roads that seemed to have been carved by hand from the woods. It looks like mankind was able to hold back the density of the woods just long enough to put a road through them. And the genuinely gruesome final scene grabbed my eyes and forced them open for at least five minutes after the credits rolled.

At its very base, *Unhinged* emulates a much older tradition of horror – the “Old Dark House” films from the 1920s and 1930s. The gore, fashion and dialect are certainly children of the 1980s. But many of the main elements of the film harken back to decades past. The old mansion, far away from civilization, is one of the big ones. There’s

also the constant rain, the members of high society collapsing, and something evil lurking in the house. All of this ties into some sort of familial trouble rooted in events from long ago. With *Unhinged,* I wasn't expecting a 1980s slasher variation on films like *The Cat And The Canary.* But that's what I got. And I'll take it. (DB)

# VACACIONES DE TERROR (1989) aka VACATION OF TERROR

**Rene Cardona III**

When eggs explode, a wall bleeds, and a possessed jeep plows through a brick wall, who you gonna call?

Hint: his name is Nacho.

I like nice people. After all, they're the reason why *Vacaciones De Terror* goes down so smoothly. For it is here that the unflappable Nacho from *Trampa Infernal* and his charismatic family band together against the forces of darkness. Darkness meaning $1.50 Mexican rip-offs of all the neat stuff that happened in *Ghost-busters* and *Poltergeist.* Typically, unremarkable PG-level trashers do as much for me as season two of *Diff'rent Strokes.* Busto. But *Vacaciones* is pleasant. Everybody's happy, nobody dies, and there are dueling Ziggy sweatshirts.

Nacho (his "real" name is Julio, but seriously c'mon) trades his "little magic box" (a Walkman) for a satanic pendant. It's only a matter of time before we wind up at his girlfriend's uncle's haunted vacation house and all hell breaks loose. Blood trees! An obese Satan doll! A muddy refrigerator! Possessed R/C cars! The kids get scared, Mom has a miscarriage (or something), Uncle plays it cool, and Nacho kicks some ghostly ass. To reveal anything further would be a travesty. Except maybe Nacho's catchphrase, which is: "I smell a ghost!"

*Vacaciones De Terror* is good clean fun. Plain and simple. Given director Rene Cardona III's sleaze-filled lineage (Dad: *Beaks: The*

*Movie,* Grandpa: *Night Of The Bloody Apes),* that assessment is surprising, but not frustrating. The 80-minute film contentedly flies by with little distinction and lots of conviction. Plus they set it up for the best sequel ever made. Nice people. Good vibes. Ghosts smell. (JZ)

# VACACIONES DE TERROR 2 (1990) aka VACATION OF TERROR 2: DIABOLICAL BIRTHDAY

**Pedro Galindo III**

Late one night, I emerged from a classic Midwestern blizzard. Work had been tough. The commute home was tougher. Ears chafed, nose running, and legs near-frozen, thoughts of paradise began to take hold. I hit the couch and fell asleep.

Nacho: “Hola, Senior!”

Me: “Nacho? Is that REALLY you? Your ponytail-mullet is out of control. Nice work! This looks like a Halloween party. I see no signs of a vacation. I specifically wanted to dream about a vacation in Hawaii or Costa Rica or something. What’s going on?”

Nacho: [laughs] “Oh, Senor Ziemba! You know so much, yet so little. We need no vacations tonight. Have you already forgotten what was revealed in *Meatcleaver Massacre* and *Jimmy, The Boy Wonder?”*

Me: “I don’t follow. Wait – is that a *Cocktail* poster?”

Nacho: [chuckles] “Very well. I will show you.”

Suddenly, a Garbage Pail Kid transformed into a demonized Yogurt from *Spaceballs.* He pointed, laughed at me, and wiggled his nose. A woman named Tatiana sang on a stage covered in sawdust. Her song was about getting punched and it sounded a lot like Tiffany's "I Think We're Alone Now." Four tires blew out while a man made a pissing sound with his mouth. A little girl was telepathically pulled across the ground by Yogurt, but clearly, a skateboard was involved. She also pushed a car down a driveway by herself. Finally, as a room spun upside down, I saw pin-ups of bikini-clad women. There was blood and a Halloween cake. This frazzled me. I could make no sense of it. Then, Nacho placed a strange, skull-shaped pendant in my hand.

Nacho: "Keep this medallion close to the heart, my friend. Use it whenever the blizzard exhausts your will. Adios, Senor Ziemba!

ADIOSSSS . . . "

My cheeks hurt. My sides ached. A sense of peace fell over the darkened room. A slow, steady mist came up from my breast pocket. I reached. The skull-pendant was in my hand. Without warning, it dissolved into a glistening, circular disc. Burned into the rim of that disc were the words:

*Vacation Of Terror 2: Diabolical Birthday.* (JZ)

# VENUS FLYTRAP (1988)

**T. Michael**

Isn't it great when you "connect" with a film? *Venus Flytrap* is a nice example. When I hear phrases such as "Let's get this party fuckin' jammin'!", "I like ta fuck!", and "Isn't darts kind of a fag game?", I feel right at home.

Halfway through *Venus Flytrap,* which is a SOV semi-rip-off of *Last House On The Left,* I started to ask questions. Were the 1960s hippies meant to be comedic? Are women really turned on by attempted rape? Is the word "fuck" a suitable replacement for true human compassion? Soon enough, my questions were answered, as The Doctrine Of Turk was thrust into my face.

Turk. He's David Hess with a David Hasselhoff strut, but much shorter. He's a stranger to the art of sentence structure. And, he's super pissed. After Turk and his two cohorts terrorize a record store and crash a "rich kid" party, a bunch of things happen:

1. More gay slurs per minute than *The Last Slumber Party,* but nothing as inventive as the all-time-greatest "queerbag."

2. Necrophilia, Russian Roulette, and lots of butts.

3. An attempt to deliver messages about women's rights, social prejudices, and pure, genuine, poignant, emotional feelings from the depths of our collective souls.

Sure. All of that is amazing. But is it enough to actually sit through this thing?

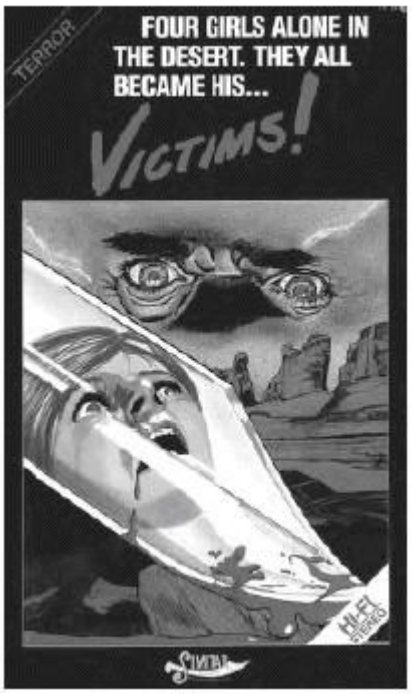
"Bitch, it's time to see some ass! LET'S GET TWEAKED!" You bet. (JZ)

# VICTIMS! (1985)

**Jeff Hathcock**

Last time I checked, it was impossible to have any sort of sexual intercourse through a pair of jeans. I was wrong.

On paper, *Victims!* is an exploitation of damaged male fantasy. The film centers on two rapes, plenty of humiliation, and belligerent attitudes – all directed towards women. Given director Jeff Hathcock's intermittent misogynistic leanings *(Night Ripper!* didn't have them, *Streets Of Death* almost didn't have them, *Fertilize The Blaspheming Bombshell* had them), this comes as no surprise. Trepidation is natural. After all, who would want to sit through a 75 minute film filled with public access disco, edits that were sloppily cut with a butter knife, and 'Nam vet assholes wearing short-shorts and XL tube socks who state, "If you wanna keep your tits, you better do as I say!"?




Exactly. You would. *Victims!* may be a theoretical rape-revenge trash can, but theory doesn't pay the bills. Abstaining from any pretense of reality, this is the illiterate second cousin that *A Night To Dismember* didn't know it had. So hold on to those tits. You're gonna need 'em.

A woman walks up a staircase. Axe to the face. Another woman exits her apartment. Knife to the back, courtesy of some guy in drag. One more woman sleeps on rainbow sheets. Machete to the everywhere. Then, a fat guy runs out of a deli and gets shot in the back. Finally,

two men accost a randy couple in the forest. Everyone gets sunburned. The boyfriend is killed. The girlfriend is beaten and raped with jeans on. There are unexplained inserts of an Asian woman in a dark room with bamboo blinds.

Incredibly, 60 minutes remain.

From there, four 35-year-old teenage girls in a large green Cadillac embark on a “field trip for geology class” while being followed (and terrorized) by two villains. Gas stations. Campsites. Rock formations. The film grinds to a halt. Maybe. I have no problem with people seducing themselves in front of mirrors, Steve Martin impressions, and dune buggy jumps.

*Victims!* tries to distress us. It really does. From the silent molestation scenes lifted from *I Spit On Your Grave* to the degrading dialogue (“And you wonder why you got raped!”), the film’s intent is understood. But, where “normal” rape-revenge knock-offs bank on exploitive callousness and little else (see *God’s Bloody Acre* for a fine example), *Victims!* is incapable all over. Thankfully. Thus, we get a film immersed in sloppy edits and the H.G. Lewis long shot. One that’s sprinkled with everyday people shouting their lines and hilarity masquerading as disturbance. As for the bad guys? One falls off of a cliff and the other gets his penis cut off. As if you didn’t know. (JZ)

# THE VIDEO DEAD (1987)

**Robert Scott**

It’s all in the verve! That’s what makes a film rise above the rest of the pack. It doesn’t take much – just a touch of imagination – to let you know that the filmmaker is trying. They don’t have to succeed. Trying is enough. When you spend a lot of time watching derivative 1980s slashers, you can get a little jaded. But then, suddenly, *The Video Dead* shows up in your VCR. And life is good.

A Satanic TV is delivered to the house of Jeff and his sister, Zoe. The TV doesn’t show *Dallas* or *Battle Of The Network Stars.* It plays one

movie, and one movie only: *Zombie Blood Nightmare.* In this film-within-a-film, the living dead are seen wandering through some woods. Then, one of them looks directly at us through the TV screen. Moments later, the zombies climb out of the TV and into the real world. An undead bride runs through the woods, waving a chainsaw. A zombie hides in a washing machine. It leaps out and strangles a housewife. A shape-shifting zombie becomes a beautiful woman and tries to seduce Jeff. Then, Zoe has dinner with the zombies. One of them puts "the moves" on her. There is also a living person inside the TV called "The Garbage Man." His job is to try to kill the undead before they escape into our world.

*The Video Dead* is a lot of fun. Most of that fun is derived from the movie's variations on zombie cliches. The main one is that the TV zombies wish to be alive again. That's what drives them. They only attack and kill if provoked. Left to their own devices, the zombies just hang out. Mirrors repel the zombies because the reflection reminds them that they are the undead. Additionally, the zombies can be killed in the same fashion as a living person. Once that happens, the characters act as if the undead are truly deceased. The zombies believe it. These twists on normal cliches kept me glued because I wanted to see what would happen next.

Some of the pacing was a little slack but that's almost always a problem with direct-to-video trash. *Curse Of The Blue Lights* had the same issue. Like that film, the direction in *Video Dead* could have been more rousing. But the creativity more than made up for that.

*The Video Dead* is not perfect. But the moments of imagination, the attempts to try something different, make it worth watching. In particular, the concept of the dead wanting nothing more than to be alive again, to be just like us, is a rather delightful and flattering thought. This film is a fine evening's entertainment. It's too bad director Robert Scott only made one film. (DB)

# VIDEO VIOLENCE (1987)

**Gary Cohen**

A woman, with her two kids in tow, grabs a copy of *I Dismember Mama* off the shelf of a New Jersey video store. Approaching the counter, she asks store owner Gary Cohen, “Does this have any nudity?” Gary replies, “No, I don’t remember any, but that film has decapitations and all sorts of other gore.” The woman shoots back: “Oh OK, then the kids can watch it.”

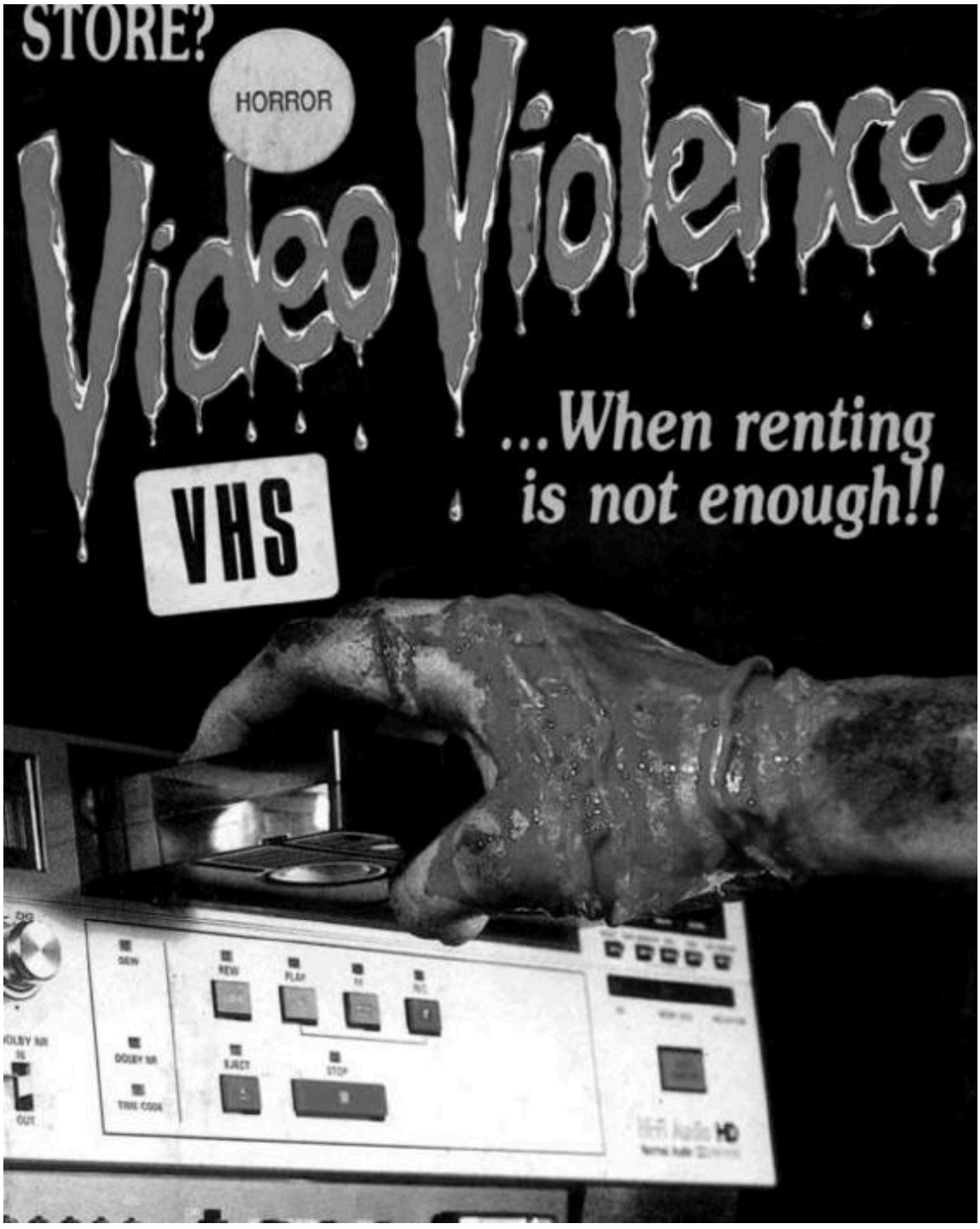
*Video Violence* was born.

By 1987, the SOV trash-horror party was in full swing. After unassuming releases of *Boardinghouse, Sledgehammer,* and *Black Devil Doll From Hell,* United Entertainment’s *Blood Cult* and *The Ripper* struck paydirt in 1985. And why not? Since home video audiences were unable to distinguish filming methods based solely on box art, producers discovered a surefire method for turning a profit. As United’s titles raked in millions, dozens of regional SOV titles appeared. Mom ’n’ pop video store shelves were flooded with more gore, more slasher-derivatives, and more madness. Yet none of these films made much of a mainstream ripple in comparison with United’s hits. Cue Gary Cohen.

Released by Los Angeles’ Camp Video, *Video Violence* was the most widely distributed and financially successful SOV horror film next to *Blood Cult.* In my interview with Cohen, he said that *Video Violence* was “created for two purposes: to reflect the idea that violence is okay but sex isn’t, and for us to have a good time.” With a few hundred dollars and some ¾” U-Matic video equipment, Cohen and company hit the streets of Frenchtown and Bound Brook, New Jersey to craft their vision of an epic gore mess-terpiece.

A married couple (him: bald and mulleted; her: rayon shirts) moves to a New York suburb and opens a video store. The patrons of the store are only interested in two things: slashers and porn. After discovering that a returned rental tape has been swapped out with a homemade snuff film, our power couple desperately tries to crack the mystery, without much help from an asinine police chief. The townspeople, including anti-heroes Howard and Eli, continue their

maim ’n’ tape snuff hobbies. Along for the ride is a surreal movie-within-a-movie called




*The Vampire Takes A Bride,* a swirling synth soundtrack, and a scene where someone rents *Blood Cult.* So meta!

*Video Violence* should be admired for its prominence in SOV history rather than its actual entertainment value. A slow blitzkrieg of cheapest gore, barest breasts, and meanest spirits, the film is aware of the atmosphere it creates. Everyone involved is clearly goofing off and approaching the subject matter with lackadaisical poise. Perhaps that's the problem. Is it funny to see a man slowly carve his name across a woman's breasts as she screams hysterically? That depends on you. As the film progresses, the tug-of-war continues. And, unlike the implausibility of *Black Devil Doll From Hell, Video Violence's* discordant sexual content can't be justified with a laugh. It's too invasive. Which is ironic, given Cohen's demure intentions. Still, the film's widespread distribution and sales ensured that SOV horror had become more than a passing novelty. By the end of 1987, it was a full-fledged home video revolution. (JZ)

# VIDEO VIOLENCE 2 . . . THE EXPLOITATION! (1987)

**Gary Cohen**

How do you follow up the despondency of *Video Violence?*

Duh. COMEDY.

Due to the success of *Video Violence,* Camp Video was interested in a sequel. There was a promise of larger scale advertising and increased big box production. Thus, someone (probably God) proclaimed, *"Video Violence 2* must be made!" And it was.

A pirate TV show is interrupting New Jersey's cable box airwaves. It's *The Howard And Eli Show!* Cue the shitty video effects screens. For the next hour, we join our *Video Violence* pals as they host a snuff film variety spectacular, complete with commercials, awful stand-up comedy, contributions from at-home viewers, and an electric piano-playing sidekick named Gordon. After the skits unfold (an electric chair explosion, topless girls torturing a pizza delivery guy, a return to the *Video Violence* store), Howard and Eli wrap up the show. Where could this movie possibly take us next?

Try picking up right where the first film left off, complete with several surprise endings. Be sure to check out the infomercial for ordering *Video Violence 2.* Freddy, Jason, and Michael Myers are standing by to accept your call.

The concept of *Video Violence 2* is obviously righteous. Luckily, the film delivers. Gary Cohen adds, "We had an even better time with *VV2,* which is, in my opinion, actually an intentionally funny movie." He's right. While it still retains a base level of mean-spiritedness from *Video Violence,* the humor works both intentionally and subversively, kind of like a H.G. Lewis take on *Kentucky Fried Movie. VV2* was Gary Cohen's final bow in the SOV arena, and remains one of the only horror-comedies produced during the late 1980s that won't hit you with a shovel and leave you for dead. It also serves as a last gasp for tangible, viable exploitation in a market that would eat itself within the next couple of years. I approve of this film. (JZ)

# VOODOO DOLLS (1989)

**Andree Pelletier**

Sometimes you watch a film and find it a bit of a struggle. Possibly there are too many people sitting around having vague conversations. Possibly there are too many storylines. Maybe things don't make sense. But then, when it ends, it's suddenly perfect. It worked. Something happened and, in spite of itself, it became worth watching.

Congratulations, *Voodoo Dolls!*

In a private school, which I thought was in Montreal but might be in New Orleans, a young woman gets the lead in a play involving voodoo or witchcraft or something. Meanwhile, one of the caretakers is engaged in voodoo rituals. The dean of the school is hot and all the gals, except our lead gal, are after him. And, well, there are actually a myriad of things happening all at once. The film is based on a novel so that goes some way towards justifying all the different things going on and the almost insane overabundance of characters.

Whole stretches of the movie passed by and left me thinking, “What was that about?” or “Why did that happen?” There are all sorts of tiny voodoo dolls sitting in rooms, looking weird. And then a man is killed by a group of them attacking him but it’s never mentioned again. And there’s a lesbian classmate subplot. And suddenly, it all ends.

The title leads you to believe the film is going one way. It is going to focus on the voodoo and the dolls. Parts of the film do, in fact, go that way. But it ends in a spot that the filmmakers have forgotten to properly flag for us. There are so many different plotlines and characters. I don’t want to ruin anything – so pardon my coy behavior – but the small scene that clarifies the lead character’s thoughts on a certain “something” isn’t there. It’s odder to watch than it is to read about. So much happens, yet this one scene, which would draw the beginning of the film into the ending and make all of it a cycle of terror, isn’t there. The scene is left out.

So the voodoo distracts you and the characters confuse you and it all ends. At that moment, the movie becomes exactly what you thought it would be all along. But it wasn’t that film for much of its running time. Was the novel like this? Surely it must have made more sense. Why all the voodoo? The book was called *The School.* I wonder if there was any voodoo in it at all. I wonder if any of what I’ve said makes sense. Maybe this film wipes sense free from all who encounter it? It’s a brainwashing tool used by the French Canadian authorities that was accidentally released on VHS for me to enjoy. (DB)

# WACKO (1982)

**Greydon Clark**

Thirteen years ago, the Lawnmower Killer murdered several kids in a small American town. Tonight is the Halloween Pumpkin Prom and the Lawnmower Killer is back. On his/her trail, there is a washed up cop named Harbinger, played by Joe Don Baker. Who will live? Who will die? And who is that big, balding guy that everyone calls Loony?

*Wacko* is a comedy. And the only real question is: Funny or not? Well, it's not going to win any Goofy Awards but it's consistently amusing. Occasionally it borders too close to "shtick" for my tastes, and it pulls out some genuine laughs, which is, frankly, a relief. The best of these is the sequence where Joe Don is driving and trying to relate what happened to him thirteen years ago but other stories keep sidelining him. If you only know Joe Don from things like *Walking Tall* and *Mitchell,* you will be very surprised.

Most of the cast does a fine job here. It turns out that George Kennedy, along with Joe Don, is really good at deadpan comedy. The younger cast does a fine job too. Julia Duffy as our Final Girl is great, especially in those moments when her voice goes very low. Andrew Dice Clay is awesome as Tony Schlongini. In the end, though, it is Joe Don Baker who seals the deal. He's parodying the sort of character he usually plays. And, damn, he's funny. He looks like he hasn't slept in weeks and he's not in the best shape but he's a powerhouse, rolling along and not allowing anyone to stand in the way of the comedy.

As with *Student Bodies* and *Thursday The 12th,* there are stretches where unfunny stuff happens, no matter how hard everybody is trying. Maybe the film could have been a few minutes shorter?

The well-known cast sometimes gets close to stealing the slasher thunder, as it were, simply because they are well-known actors. A true slasher parody should really have no one you'd ever seen before or since staring in it. *Student Bodies* wins that contest. *Wacko* isn't quite as Mel Brooks as *Thursday The 12th,* but it's less like a slasher than *Student Bodies.*

Watching all three of them in a row is quite fascinating. All three successfully nail the slasher tropes in similar ways, and fail in similar ways, via recurring gags. *Student Bodies* is better than the others because, frankly, it has funnier lines. But they all work nicely as a collage of gags about this much-maligned, but honestly quite beloved, subgenre of film. (DB)

# WELCOME TO SPRING BREAK (1988) aka NIGHTMARE BEACH

### Harry Kirkpatrick aka Umberto Lenzi

Spring Break. Miami Beach. Thousands of college kids storming the beaches and bars for a rowdy week of yelling, listening to bands with big hair, and drinking. At the local penitentiary, a biker named Diablo

is executed for murder. His gang says he was framed. The mayor and sheriff don't care about that. They've got all those spring breakers to worry about. But someone on a motorcycle begins electrocuting the rowdy kids. Is it Diablo returned from the dead? Or is it someone else?

Were you as bored reading that as I was writing it? *Welcome To Spring Break* is the most innocuous film I've seen in a long, long time. Stuff happens, but I wasn't interested in any of it. There's no energy to the film. No drive. No life. I truly believe that this is the first film ever made by people who were sound asleep. Is it a slasher? A biker film? A T&A party film? A film about city corruption? A love story? It could have been all of those and brilliant. But it's none of those and it hurts a little. The film sets up all of the characters and the situations and a vague whiff of mystery. But my interest started as a steady stream and it became a drip. It felt like the movie would never end and I could no longer remember a time when I wasn't watching this movie. Then the credits finally roll and it feels like someone poured ice water over my scalding brain.

Even the music by the normally excellent Claudio Simonetti is tiresome. Whenever the heroine is being threatened, the drum machines and synths kick in. This is so inappropriate to the mood that I would have laughed if I could have stop sighing. Honestly, is there anything worse than a mid-80s synth-pop tune that is going along with great force and then – suddenly – a saxophone solo bursts out of nowhere? If my suicide had a soundtrack, it would feature one of those solos.

Director Umberto Lenzi is trying to do a *Jaws* rip-off thing with the covering up of all the killings. Only, this isn't a small coastal town. It's Miami. That type of logic almost makes me say, "That's Italian!" But the plotting and logic that works in classic Italian horror films, like *Suspiria* or *Bay Of Blood,* feels out of place here. I think it's because everyone's speaking sync-sound English in Miami. If we were in Europe on strange locations, with constant dubbing, it might have been charming.

If you're not convinced that you won't like *Welcome To Spring Break,* try this: When people see the killer biker, several of them believe it is Diablo. Why? Every member of the gang rides a big, loud, classic "hog" that kicks ass. The killer rides a brand new one that has little plastic compartments attached to the back of the seat. Why did the characters think that Diablo had returned from the dead? Wouldn't he be riding his older, more badass bike on a mission of revenge? It doesn't make sense at all. It makes even less sense when you realize that Lenzi felt the audience would be convinced that a living dead killer would ride such a lame motorcycle. Give us some credit. (DB)

# WINTERBEAST (1991)

**Christopher Thies**

People are vanishing deep in the New England mountains. The rangers are stumped. There is talk of a Winterbeast legend. Monsters and demons appear. Mr. Sheldon, who wears a loud plaid jacket and runs the Wild Goose Lodge, may be behind it all. I could continue to list plot details about *Winterbeast* for the rest of this review. But it really doesn't matter. Because this film floats in the same rarefied air as some of my all-time favorites. *Don't Go In The Woods, The Last Slumber Party* and *Tales From the Quadead Zone* epitomize true weirdness and beauty in 1980s low-budget cinema. These films speak to me directly. And I hear what they're saying every time I watch.

The tagline on *Winterbeasfs* VHS box reads: *“Evil Dead* meets *Northern Exposure.”* At its heart, this film is just that. Some horror, some comedy. There are creepy demon monsters for the horror aspect. But the tone of the comedy is all over the place. It’s hard to tell what is intentional and what is a non-comedic scene that just happens to be hilarious. The visual of a wooden penis in a talisman box seems funny. But its off-handed presentation makes me uncertain in my response. Characters tell jokes, but they’re never funny. There’s a wiseguy ranger named Stillman who delivers every line like it’s a set-up for a gag. He insults people and then says “I was just trying to start a conversation!” But the timing is off, in both his delivery and the editing of the scene. That makes the gag seem like an accident, rather than a plan. *Winterbeast* looks like it could be full-on comedy but it doesn’t feel like full-on comedy because I’m not laughing. In another universe, this might be a hindrance. In our universe, weird comedy equals wonder and magic and elation.

Take the dubbing, for instance. Sometimes it aligns perfectly. We see the movements of the actors' mouths and hear the corresponding words correctly. But there are moments when the audio slips out of sync. During a rambling five minute chat between two rangers in a cabin, the dialogue matches. Then, it doesn't. As the scene goes, the movement of the mouth gets farther away from the words that are being spoken. This is fun to watch but makes little sense. Other scenes have sync sound. But whenever a monster attacks, the volume of the music is turned up and I can't hear any of the dialogue. The energetic monsters in *Winterbeast* are pure stop-motion fun. They don't really fit in with the world around them. The monster action is animated on small sets that are clearly fake. When

the monsters grab a human, the human becomes stop-motion too. The Winterbeast itself is a giant demon with a wrinkled face, devil horns protruding from its forehead, and it has a deep growl. It brawls with the ranger and a friend of his at the end of the film. This might be the weirdest final fight I've ever seen. Apart from one shot, the humans are never on screen with the monster.

One scene in particular defines why *Winterbeast* is such a favorite of mine. Mr. Sheldon has strung up the body of a female ranger inside of his lodge. He plays with the torn skin on her neck. Then, Sheldon puts on a recording of a woman with a chipmunk voice singing "Johnny's So Long at the Fair." He puts on a clown mask. It's one of those old-style Halloween masks with the string of elastic that goes around the back of the head. Sheldon then proceeds to prance around the room, caressing corpses and waving his hands around in a one-man Busby Berkley parody. It reminded me of Dean Stockwell lip-syncing to "In Dreams" in David Lynch's *Blue Velvet.* As a visual disturbance, *Winterbeast* almost tops Lynch's scene because there is no slickness or artistry. It's just a man in a mask dancing to a melancholy song while he caresses corpses. This could be what the man actually does to relax at home.

*Winterbeast* drips with weirdness. It's all one big pile of greatness up to, and including, the final dubbed line. This line inspires a hearty laugh from the characters onscreen but sounds as if it was dubbed by completely different people than the rest of the film. When you're done reading this, go out and find yourself a copy. Every minute will be worth it. (DB)

# WITCHERY (1988)
# aka WITCHCRAFT

### Fabrizio Laurenti

*Witchery* may look like it takes place in America, but it doesn't. Does that young man look like David Hasselhoff? It's not. Is that English they're speaking? I have no clue. Welcome to Alterna-Earth – the

place where Filmirage lives. A little hole was ripped in the time/space continuum and the people from Filmirage slipped through and made some cash off of inter-dimensional films. They still laugh all the way to the bank whenever any of us watch *The Crawlers* or *Troll 2.* And especially when we watch *Witchery.*

The spirit of an actress haunts a strange house on an island somewhere off the coast of New England. A bunch of people assemble there and the spirit begins to kill them. Satan shows up at one point. And, with a wave of their hands, Filmirage has done it again! One of the joys of this supernatural mess is that a keen-eyed viewer can spot the inconsistencies that define it as a Film From Another Time, Another Place. Here are the most obvious:

David Hasselhoff and Linda Blair are in the same movie. With one, it's simply fun. With both, it's a level of brilliance that an Earth Human could not conceive. I wouldn't be surprised if Marjoe Gortner was featured in the director's cut.

There's a misjudging of the "cute factor" inherent in child actors. The little boy in this film is not meant to be annoying. He's meant to be a charming, cute little kid. The child actor is just not very good. It almost seems like the kid is annoyed at having to be in a movie. That annoyance spilled over into how he portrays the character. Where did Filmirage find this child? And why is he in a movie?

Old ladies with thick accents are not the height of scary. The witch in this movie is old. She has a thick accent. When she speaks "English," you're not sure that she knows what she's saying. You can't even tell where the sentence is going. The precipitous use of dangerous grammar is a Filmirage hallmark.

The lead actress looks tranquilized. You loved the lazy-eyed girls in *Unhinged!* Meet their foreign sister, Leslie! Leslie looks very sleepy. Her voice is dull and she doesn't seem to understand a word of what she's saying, just like the witch. I don't know if Leslie is speaking phonetically but when she talks the emphasis always seems wrong. The emotions and feelings in the things she's saying don't always seem to match up with her eyes and her movements. It's like watching the cast of *West Side Story* performing while someone plays the music from *Guys & Dolls.*

Finally, the last line before a freeze frame is given to Leslie, who doesn't seem to know what she's saying. Leslie is in a hospital bed. She is told something important. She turns to the camera, says the final line, and all the worlds, be they ours or Filmirage's, rejoice in unison. You will never forget this moment.

Filmirage is the best. Who were they? Where did they come from? How many movies did they make? These are all things I could easily look up. However, I prefer to remain in the dark and believe that their films slipped into our world between a gap in the "now" and the "then." I'll call it Earth-15. I think Norwegian Cruise Lines goes there. Care to join me? (DB)

# WOODCHIPPER MASSACRE (1989)

**Jon McBride**

*Cannibal Campout* was Jon McBride's debut SOV film. Someone ate a fetus in that movie. *Woodchipper Massacre* is McBride's direct follow-up. It was also shot in Connecticut. But no one eats a fetus in it. Something is wrong. However, a twelve-year-old with a mullet

wears XXXL gold-rimmed glasses and rips some ass on his air guitar.

Something is right.

When Dad takes off on a weekend trip, he leaves siblings Jon (Jon McBride), Denise (some girl), and Thomas (air guitar boss) under the care of pain-in-the-ass Aunt Tess (Jon's mom Patricia McBride). Denise yells, "She's a pill!" and Thomas replies, "What a space cadet!" Denise paints her toes. Jon plays the piano. Birds wander in the backyard. After a misunderstanding, Thomas' authentic Rambo survival knife plunges into Tess' gut. The body must be disposed of. To the woodchipper! Soon after, cousin Kim arrives. He is AMPED. He also has a problem with spittle and says "fuck" a lot.

Falling somewhere between an episode of *Small Wonder* and a high school madrigals performance, *Woodchipper Massacre* is fine entertainment. But that's not due to anything intentional. Like *Phantom Brother* and *Video Violence 2,* this film follows the trend of most late-80s SOV in that it attempts to make us laugh rather than puke. Aside from the $400 budget, lack of actual actors, and obscenities, this could pass for a nondescript 80s sitcom. But that's not why it's funny. It's funny because there are montages of people cutting the grass and cooking dinner. There are establishing shots of bird feeders, extreme close-ups of mouths during mundane conversations, and songs that sound like what happens when you push "demo" on a Casio keyboard. *Woodchipper* isn't what you'd expect from the title. That's why it satisfies. (JZ)

THE FAMILY THAT SLAYS TOGETHER
STAYS TOGETHER
HOW MUCH FLESH COULD A WOODCHIPPER CHIP
IF A WOODCHIPPER COULD CHIP FLESH?
WOODCHIPPER MASSACRE
Starring JON McBRIDE DENICE BOEAL TOM CASIELLO
PATRICIA McBRIDE KIN BAILEY PERRIN PAGE
Written, Produced and Directed by JON McBRIDE

# THE ZERO BOYS (1986)

**Nico Mastorakis**

I once worked as an art director for a realty office. One of the higher-ups was what you might consider a “man’s man.” He loved sports. He owned a formidable German shepherd. His wife had large, artificial breasts. This man often arrived at work in a vintage baby-blue Pontiac Firebird, blaring the horn while showing off one of Southwest-styled leather blazers. However, he did not have a license plate that read “ZERO BOYZ.”

What a fucking pussy.

*The Zero Boys* combines testosterone-fueled “survival games” with only the finest in backwoods slasher threads circa 1986.

It’s a lot more “interesting” than the similarly themed *Commando Games: Deadly Pursuit* in that some things actually happen. If in doubt, please refer to the first five minutes, in which someone is shot in the crotch, a man dresses up as Hitler, and a glossy photo of Rambo is tacked to a wall, followed by the phrase, “Eat your heart out, Sly.”

Upon trumping the Weekend Warriors Survival Game Tournament, Steve, Rip and Larry (aka THE ZERO BOYZ) grab the Zero Girlz, load up Steve'z jeep, and head out for a celebration in the woodz. Right after I noticed that the jeep'z license plate read "ZERO BOYZ," Steve'z new gal sez, "I fuck on the first date." Then the gang breaks into a house. Why? Well, no one's home and the owners are "probably just a bunch of faggots livin' in the woods." As a sea of ill-timed sexual innuendoes flow, a pair of killers in Chuck Taylors give The Zero Boyz a run for their mullets.

Although I zoned out for a majority of this film, I cannot praise *The Zero Boys* enough for its discerning stance on gender roles, *Friday The 13th* references, and humping puns. In an era when other semi-slashers were concerned with playing guitars without strings *(Killer Party)* or running over babies with cars *(Truth Or Dare?), The Zero Boys* does not shy away from social commentary: Competitive men, trophy women, and the trials they face in the aftermath of a paintball game. (JZ)

# ZOMBIE LAKE (1981)
# aka LE LAC DES MORTS VIVANTS

**Jean Rollin**

When people don't show up for work in the United States, they get fired. No one is happy. When people don't show up for work in Europe, they get *Zombie Lake.*

Everyone is happy.

In the right hands, unfortunate circumstances can lead to majestic work. Check out Doris Wishman's *A Night To Dismember* for a taste. Like that accidental beauty, *Zombie Lake* is in the right hands. As the story (and Phil Hardy's *Overlook Encyclopedia Of Horror)* goes, gutter-poet Jess Franco was all set to direct the film, which he also wrote. However, when the clapboards clapped, Franco was M.I.A. Eurocine put out a call. Jean Rollin answered.

*Zombie Lake* is magic. At face value, it's a full frontal nudie-cutie that showcases a handful of placid WWII zombies. That's reason enough to love it. And, if anyone other than Jean Rollin had directed, that might have been the only reason to love it. Like fellow Frenchman Eric Rohmer, Rollin is a man beset with cataloging his sexual obsessions on film. Over. And over. And over. But where Rohmer elegantly presents the exploration of men, women, and their sexual desires, Rollin pummels us with breasts, pubes, and their respective placement within the canon of horror. Rollin's work is just as intriguing and meticulous as the more respected Rohmer, but it's not for intellectuals. There's nothing emotional about *Rape Of The Vampire* – it's simply beautiful trash. So what happens when this assured artisan is thrown into a situation with no time to think, no clout to spread, and little room for craftsmanship? You got it: magic.

Slightly west of *Ogroff*'s enchanted forest lies the Lake Of The Dead. It works on the same principle: whenever someone gets close (in this case, very naked ladies), they bite the big one at the hands and mouths of green-faced soldier zombies with bulging eyes. Sometimes, zombies emerge from the lake with not one drop of water on them. Other times, the lake magically transforms into a backyard swimming pool when the camera moves underwater. Soon enough, some hastily assembled villagers, led by lethargic mayor Howard Vernon, decide to take care of business. Flashbacks of sex during wartime reveal that the head zombie has a daughter. He wants to give the kid her dead mother's pendant. Most of this

happens after a Volkswagen full of female volleyball players arrives at the lake. There is also a giant flamethrower.

For 80 minutes, *Zombie Lake* floats by on a stoned cloud of adolescent escapism, melodramatic oafishness, and spontaneous technique. That is to say, it's a sumptuous mess, residing on a tier where absurdity begets lo-fi grandeur. Everything about the film is wrong. Everything about the film is right. And, unlike a majority of Rollin's filmography, you don't have to work for it – the slow-burn dreaminess is innate. Everywhere. Ominous string quartets, haunting pianos, and cocktail hour jazz (all courtesy Daniel White, Jess Franco's stock composer) complement the quivering camerawork while propelling the mood. Shots of equipment, crew members, and people cracking up were not edited out, giving the film a misplaced sense of real-life urgency. Boobs serve as padding when zombie soldiers do not. Everyone appearing onscreen appears to be either highly confused or highly disconnected or highly entertained. Just like us. And, probably, just like Jean Rollin. (JZ)

LE LAC
DES
MORTS VIVANT

# ZOMBIES INVADE PITTSBURG (1988)

**Jess Turner**

You might as well forego formalities and just take off your pants. Because *Zombies Invade Pittsburg* will enter your home, hold you down, violate you for days on end, and leave you begging for more of its sweet, sweet beard. If you don't beardlieve me, relax for a second. Breathe. And let's talk beards.

*Zombies Invade Pittsburg* is a severely bankrupt, yet brilliantly flawed, SOV obscurity. This film runs 85 minutes. Approximately 30 of those 85 minutes are spent in the company of Police Captain Stefans. In his office. Talking into a phone, a CB, or towards other people. Big deal, right? Well, yes. It is a big deal. Because Stefans has a beard. Not his own beard, but the kind of beard that can be purchased at a mall during the Halloween season. Only this beard is a bit different – it's a very large beard. And a dirty one. It was probably a urinal cake at a train station men's room for a few weeks. Then, it may have been placed inside a cow's ass for safekeeping. Two years later, someone else found the beard and tied it around Captain Stefans' face (we can see the string). If you haven't caught on yet, let me get more specific:

*Zombies Invade Pittsburg* is a gift. We should all be grateful.

Initially conceived as a local TV Halloween special, *Zombies* is little more than a home movie from director/caterer/whatever-else-you-can-think-up Jess Turner. So who's Jess Turner? He is Captain Stefans. He is not Chester Turner's more rational cousin. Unfortunately. But let's pretend that he is. Because *Zombies* is the only SOV film outside of Chester's works that features a predominantly black cast. And it feels like a Chester Turner film, if a Chester Turner film were stripped of its life-enriching madness, but left with its bizarre cultural obeisance. *Zombies* is a repetitive, droning exercise in real people attempting to interact with other real people, and failing. There are also chemical-spill zombies who shuffle along to the VHS-ripped soundtrack from *Just Before Dawn* while attacking Sears shoppers in empty, pitch-black parking lots. That's all fine. But really, the film is notable for two things: 1. It's hysterical, and 2. It's hysterical. Earnestly so.

“This shit’s seeping right into the delta! Damn, man. SHIT.

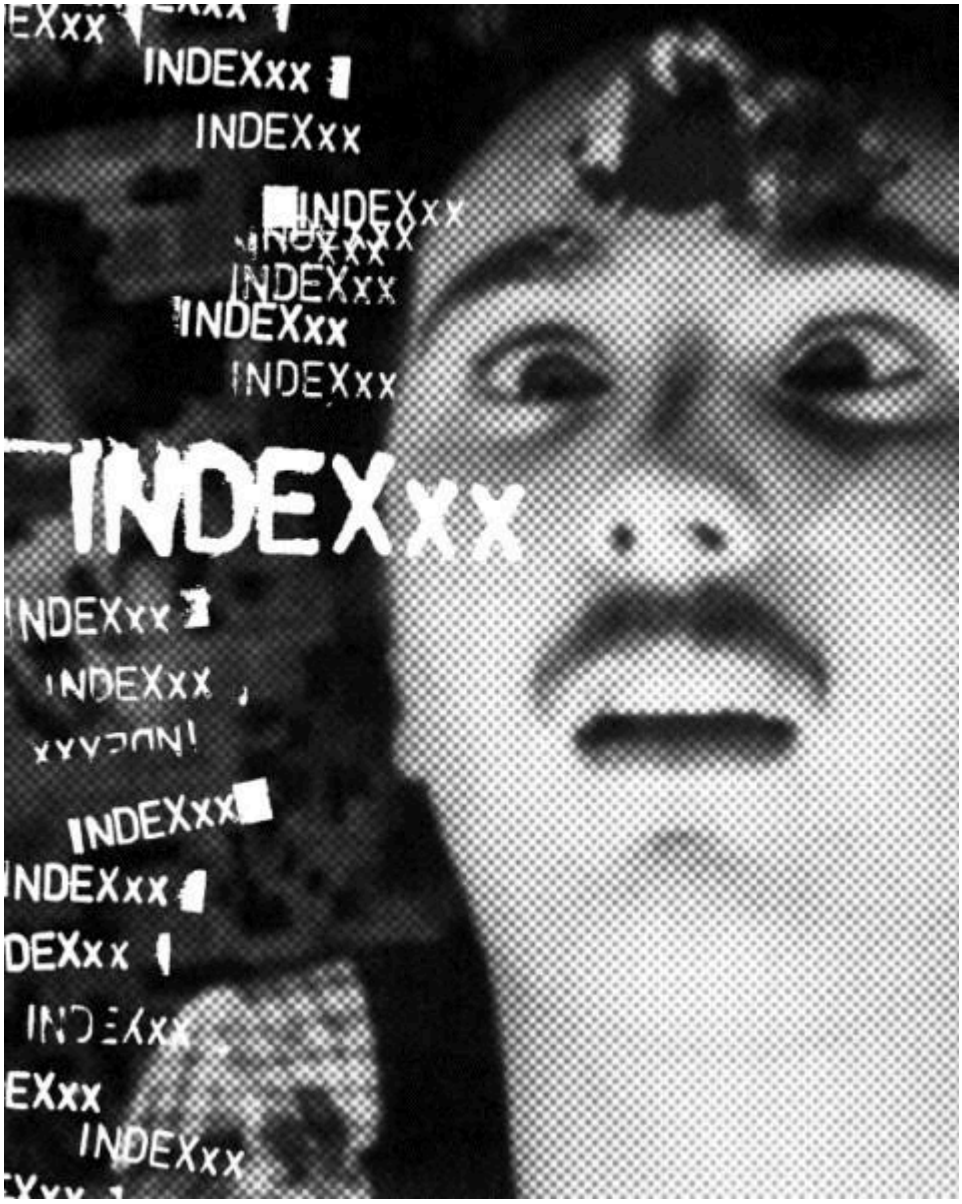
Damn, man! DAMN! Jesus Christ, man! Damn, man! DAYMN!”

A maddeningly static camera. The constant, scene-slashing fades-to-black. The world’s greatest non-party. Shockingly awesome fake newscasts. If I made a laundry list of every wonderfully defective moment in *Zombies,* this review would be very long. No one wants that. In this case, it’s more fun to leave the discovery in your hands. This is a breezy, somewhat draining form of lo-fi ecstasy on par with *Blood Lake* or *The Hook Of Woodland Heights* via David “The Rock” Nelson’s dual-VCR attack. But it’s more cooperative and less transparent, falling even further away from our expectations of what a movie should feel like. Turner and friends were simply having fun. That much is clear. And they all seem like nice people. It’s just that somewhere along the way, everything that happened during the shooting of this film was proactively left in. For the film’s beardefit. And for ours.

“Any of this shit get on y’all while y’alls was over there?”

“Nah, we cool. But the trails of blood are leading to nowhere.”

Thank you, Jess Turner. (JZ)

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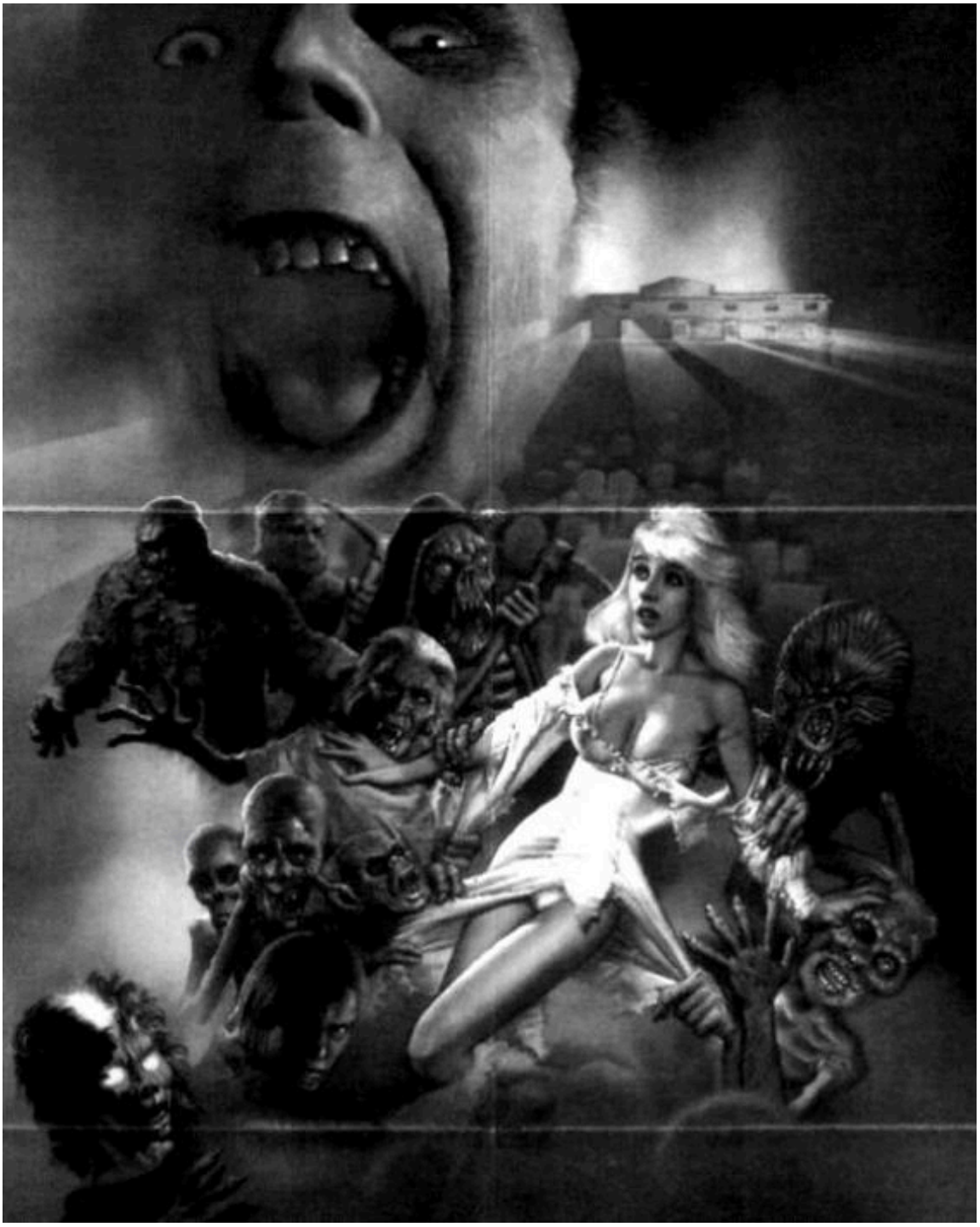

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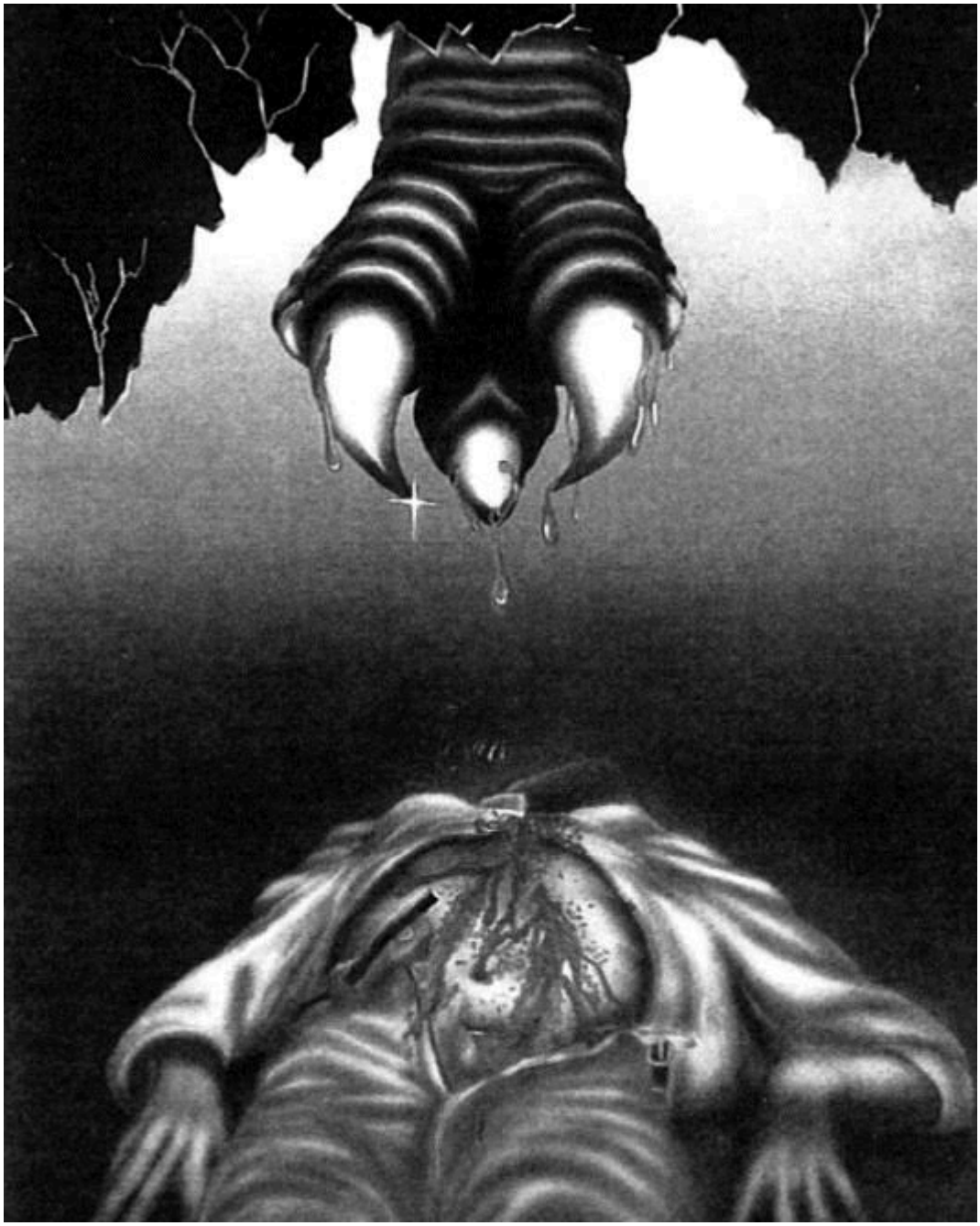

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